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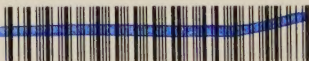
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WRITERS AND CRITICS

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ONE of the most famous of living Catholic writers and one of the most widely translated in the Anglo-Saxon world, François Mauriac, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1952, has also been a controversial figure throughout his career: in the 1920s, when his novels of love scandalised Church opinion, as in the 1950s and 1960s, when his attacks from the liberal standpoint on the colonial policy of successive French governments—incorporating the Christian Democrats—and his subsequent support for De Gaulle following the inception of the Fifth Republic in 1958 made him one of France's leading political commentators. Critical opinion, often tied to the theological, moral, or political controversy surrounding this prolific writer to the extent of blurring his purely artistic achievement, has ranged from unquestioning exegesis to curt dismissal. The present study, dispassionate in its approach to these problems but sympathetic towards the man and the writer, seeks to relate the fundamental themes of the work to the private experience, to identify the specific nature of Mauriac's imaginative enterprise, and to provide a fresh assessment of his achievement as novelist and dramatist.

Cecil Jenkins, whose academic publications include an edition of one of the best-known of Mauriac's novels, *Thérèse Desqueyroux*, lectures in French at the University of Sussex.

MAURIAC

CECIL JENKINS

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C.J.

ABBREVIATED TITLES BY WHICH MAURIAC'S WORKS ARE CITED IN REFERENCES

Initials only have been used in the case of non-imaginative writings.

<i>Baiser</i>	=	<i>Le Baiser au lépreux (A Kiss for the Leper).</i>
<i>B.N.</i>	=	<i>Bloc-Notes, 1952-7.</i>
<i>Chair</i>	=	<i>La Chair et le sang (Flesh and Blood).</i>
<i>C.Q.Œ.C.</i>	=	<i>Ce que je crois (What I believe).</i>
<i>Désert</i>	=	<i>Le Désert de l'amour (The Desert of Love).</i>
<i>D.M.</i>	=	<i>Dieu et Mammon (God and Mammon).</i>
<i>E.I.</i>	=	<i>Écrits intimes.</i>
<i>Enfant</i>	=	<i>L'Enfant chargé de chaînes (Young Man in Chains).</i>
<i>Feu</i>	=	<i>Le Feu sur la terre.</i>
<i>Fin</i>	=	<i>La Fin de la nuit (The End of the Night, in Thérèse).</i>
<i>Fleuve</i>	=	<i>Le Fleuve de feu (The River of Fire).</i>
<i>Œ.</i>	=	<i>Journal.</i>
<i>Œ. 30</i>	=	<i>Journal d'un Homme de trente ans.</i>
<i>M.I.</i>	=	<i>Mémoires intérieurs (Mémoires Intérieurs).</i>
<i>Mystère</i>	=	<i>Le Mystère Frontenac (The Frontenac Mystery).</i>
<i>N.B.N.</i>	=	<i>Le nouveau Bloc-Notes, 1958-60.</i>
<i>Nœud</i>	=	<i>Le Nœud de vipères (The Knot of Vipers).</i>
<i>P.A.</i>	=	<i>La Pierre d'achoppement (The Stumbling Block).</i>
<i>Passage</i>	=	<i>Passage du Malin.</i>
<i>Phar.</i>	=	<i>La Pharisienne (A Woman of the Pharisees).</i>
<i>Robe</i>	=	<i>La Robe prétexte (The Stuff of Youth).</i>
<i>Récits</i>	=	<i>Trois Récits.</i>
<i>Thérèse</i>	=	<i>Thérèse Desqueyroux (Thérèse).</i>
<i>V.R.</i>	=	<i>La Vie de Jean Racine.</i>

CHAPTER I

THE PRIZEWINNER AND THE CRITICAL PROBLEM

"My life," noted Mauriac humorously a few years ago—he had on this particular occasion been made an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters—"has turned out to be one long prize-giving."¹ And it is true that, while as a writer and as a journalist he has often seemed a controversial and even a lonely figure, his career as man of letters in the French manner has indeed been the spectacular one which Maurice Barrès predicted for him more than half a century ago.

It is a longer time still since the tormented, exalted adolescent in Bordeaux—where Mauriac was born on 11 Oct. 1885—dreamt of making of his writing a "raft" that might preserve his individuality from being submerged by a limited provincial society and, ultimately, keep him from foundering upon what he apprehended as the black and dangerous waters of existence. To-day, the raft has long since come to port. With his Nobel Prize already far behind him, Mauriac has come to terms with his divided inheritance, has achieved a great measure of self-acceptance and displays an impressive serenity—at least away from Paris and its polemics.* For the old man

* A purely personal attack on Mauriac—venomous and vulgarly posturing, if not entirely unprovoked—was made by Roger Peyrefitte in *Arts*, 6-12 May 1964. Peyrefitte presents Mauriac as a female-type homosexual and, in his defence of *bourgeois* sexual morality, as a hypocrite. In view of the lavish use of the "smear technique" and of "style" in this piece, it is not entirely clear whether Peyrefitte is saying that Mauriac has been an active homosexual, but this does seem to be implied by several of the allusions. Two observations are called for in

living anew and with moving intensity the continuum of his life from childhood onwards, the occasional honour is now little more than the distant reflexion of a long war of attrition against the self already waged and won. Amid the vineyards and the pine forests which constitute the essential landscape of his writings, Mauriac's face is soft with an expectant happiness, the gesture with which he indicates "the cemetery where I'll go if I die at Malagar" almost playful. All of which, strangely, serves also to emphasise that the resolution of the conflicts set up in Bordeaux so long ago has taken a lifetime. . . .

Sixty books have scarcely exhausted the love-hate relationship with this region which Mauriac abandoned almost as many years ago at the age of twenty-one. If Paris has been the privileged platform for the man of letters, the human reality behind the writings has never ceased to be Bordeaux: "that name by which I designate the whole substance of my work."² "The story of Bordeaux," he has written simply, "is the story of my body and of my soul."³ The effect upon his work of the traumatic intensity of Mauriac's childhood and adolescence will call for further consideration; for the moment it will suffice to note that the Parisian man of letters has always known that there was ultimately no escape from what he has often called his "inner" or his "mystical"

this connexion. In the first place, while Mauriac's frequent references to his "secret drama" and to his "inner struggle" combine with his rather feminine sensibility and the circumstances of his upbringing to suggest that he may have had such inclinations, it seems very unlikely that he has over the years been a practising homosexual. His private situation, the internal development of his work, and his very references to an inner struggle suggest the contrary, while he himself gives the impression in conversation that the involvement which threatened his marriage in the late 1920s was a relationship with a woman. In the second place, since the prime opposition in Mauriac's writings is between the moral demands of Christianity and sexuality *as such*, this consideration would not seem significantly to affect the analysis of the work.

Bordeaux, from the configuration of dark streets and darker mysteries that answered the terrors and the longings of the frail, timid, self-dramatising child of seventy years ago. Certainly, when he finally arrived in Paris in 1906—in theory to attend classes at the École des Chartes but in fact to become a writer—Mauriac's armoury was already stocked and the elements of his future work in place: the Family, the "Pharisees," the central theme of the escape from solitude towards self-fulfilment, the basic conflict between passion and religion. And beneath the joy of the arrival, there was the intimation that the journey had in some sense been illusory, that the future was already inscribed in the past, that the literary adventure was to be less the discovery of Paris than the resolution of Bordeaux.

For the young Catholic, pre-1914 Paris was an unsettled and paradoxical place. On the one hand, there were the problems brought to the fore by the Modernist movement—which was condemned by the Encyclical *Pascendi* in 1907—and the disturbing involvement of Church opinion on the wrong side in the Dreyfus affair. On the other hand, with new developments in physics and mathematics supporting a reaction against the determinist materialism of the late nineteenth century, there was a strong current of religious revival. In literature, such Catholic traditionalists as Barrès and Bourget were well in the van, while a whole series of spectacular conversions—to include Claudel, Maritain, Péguy, Rivière, and even, briefly, Cocteau—had already begun. In the universities, the religious current remained prominent right up to 1914. With the new general interest in social problems, the young Catholic circles in which Mauriac was soon active were in a state of high excitement.

If Mauriac was a little too fastidious and self-absorbed, and perhaps also a little too critically perceptive, to do more than sample Marc Sangnier's pioneering Christian

Democrat grouping, Le Sillon, which came under censure from the Vatican—it was only much later and taking up a deliberate stance against his own class that he hailed Christ as a worker and a Jew—he became president of the Cercle Montalembert and began writing as an overtly Catholic author. Once the acclaim of Barrès had ensured his successful launching with his first volume of verse, *Les Mains jointes*, published at his own expense in 1909, he produced *L'Adieu à l'adolescence* (1911), then the novels *L'Enfant chargé de chaînes* (1913), *La Robe prétexte* (1914) and—interrupted by the War and not published until 1920—*La Chair et le sang*. The climate of these early writings is suggested by the titles themselves. Essentially we have a world of rather aristocratic and literary young men, not deeply involved in living, making somewhat heavy weather of the Baudelairian *mal du siècle*, hovering between the nostalgic memory of childhood, allied to a distaste for the ordinary on the one hand and, on the other, the temptations of Garish Pleasure, but looking beyond this elegiac self-analysis for a law to live by, for a point of stability: for a chaste and satisfying love.

The reality of war was to interrupt this quest and to hasten the maturing of Mauriac's talent. He had married Jeanne Lafont in 1913, but was now called away for two years to act as a hospital orderly in the *Services sanitaires*. At the end of March 1917, after four months at Salonika, he was invalided out. Back in France, he devoted himself to his writing, to the "moral accounts-book" of his diary and to the study of other "restless spirits" such as Lacordaire, Baudelaire, and Amiel. This self-examination was impelled to a large extent by the "feeling of the collapse of a whole world"⁴—by a sense that the closed and comfortable little scene he had known before the War was giving way to a new and frightening one in which the scruples and concerns informing his life so far were being ruthlessly swept away. His novel *Préséances* (1921), which develops the satirical strain already present in *La Chair*

et le sang, reflects the disorientation of the aftermath.

Although it marks an advance over its predecessors, however, *Préséances* is still too improbable and derivative to count as a mature work: Mauriac is still lacking in control and perspective. "To write is to lay oneself bare," he tells us in the opening words of *Dieu et Mammon*, and elsewhere he writes, significantly: "every drama that is invented reflects a drama that lies too deep for invention."⁵ Paradoxically, however, profound self-expression in the novel calls for the freedom given by mastery of the discipline of objective presentation. These early novels are too directly semi-autobiographical to express Mauriac's "drama" in more than a confused manner. It is with the mature cycle of novels extending from *Le Baiser au lépreux* (1922), which he later came to see as the first novel of which he was not ashamed, to *Destins* (1928) that Mauriac was to achieve himself as a writer, establish his reputation, and come sharply up against the problem of the responsibility of the writer.

In this central phase of his career as a novelist, Mauriac is scrutinising the various faces of love in middle-class provincial life and against a broadly Catholic background. *Le Baiser au lépreux* is a cruel account of the failure of an arranged marriage, *Le Fleuve de feu* (1923) a story of passion in which vice seemed to many Catholics to have more body than virtue, *Genitrix* (1923) a haunting story of destructive mother-love. The violence of these themes produced mounting protests from Catholic commentators who, while often recognising the artistic merits of the work, saw it as morbidly pessimistic and corrosive.

In the face of this opposition—and in fact rationalising the direction he was already taking—Mauriac decided to stop writing formally as a Catholic novelist but to aim rather at a simply naturalistic rendering of the world, arguing that this in itself would constitute an "indirect apology for Christianity."⁶ Artistically, this proved to be a blessing in disguise in that it freed him from inhibition

and forced him to discipline his writing in order to persuade more concretely. Two complementary studies of the conflict between love and the Family produced at this time—*Le Désert de l'amour* (1925), which won the Academy's Grand Prix du Roman, and *Thérèse Desqueyroux* (1927), which a literary "jury" in France has classed as one of the "best dozen novels of the first half of the century"—should probably be ranked along with, if rather above the earlier *Genitrix* and the later *Nœud de vipères* (1932) as his best works. With *Destins* (1928), however, the rebellious mood of *Thérèse Desqueyroux* is developed to the point where Mauriac arrives at a climacteric in his career. The "moment of choice" which now confronted him was to effect a considerable change in his writing.⁷

It was in the year of *Destins* that the mounting conflict informing the novels—and which had now become an acute crisis in Mauriac's private life—came into the open with *Souffrances du chrétien*, almost a symbolical cry for help in which he declared bitterly that Christianity, in that it made no allowance for the flesh, was not a practicable religion. Mauriac was now privately and publicly—as man, as Catholic, and as writer—at the turning-point, and this conflict was given objective force by the publication of a letter from André Gide. In the early part of the year Mauriac had published *La Vie de Jean Racine*, an obviously "intuitive biography" in which he tends to identify his own situation, a little hyperbolically, with that of Racine after *Phèdre*—and in which, ironically, it is clear from his praise for Racine's courage in "taking sides against himself" that the crisis was in process of resolving itself. Gide, following up a reference to himself in the biography, praised the work, but called in question the moral influence of Mauriac's novels by suggesting that they were in fact conniving at the sin which they appeared to denounce. It is probably because Mauriac was himself sensitive to this possibility that he felt, momen-

tarily, that he had been stabbed in the back by this infidel friend whom he had courageously defended at some cost to himself—he was at that very moment being rebuked in *La Croix* for “glorifying” this “abject author.”⁸ At all events, Mauriac now found himself for some months in the position, almost, of an actor trying to solve a basically private problem on the stage.

There followed what has sometimes been referred to as Mauriac’s “conversion,” although in fact he at no time lost his faith. He adjusted his private life and “retracted” *Souffrances* early in 1929 with *Bonheur du chrétien* in which, if the actual content of his thought has not basically changed, he expresses a new conviction: “the wonderment of a soul all at once appeased.”⁹ He also answered Gide with *Dieu et Mammon*, a passionate if not very incisive consideration of the problem of the writer’s responsibility, which led him to the conclusion that he must improve the moral effect of his writing not by changing his view of his art but by “purifying the source.” And indeed, over the next few years, he makes an impressive effort to deepen his faith—undertaking a fresh study of Pascal and producing such works as *Le Jeudi Saint* (1931), a meditation on the Eucharist, and *Pèlerins* (1932). For his audience, however, the real test lay obviously in the field of fiction.

With *Le Nœud de vipères* (1932), which shows him beginning to write in a more broadly charitable manner and to explore the problem of rendering salvation, it seemed to many that the battle had been won; Charles du Bos was speaking for his co-religionists when he congratulated Mauriac on having “sterilised his instruments” and hailed this as the starting-point of his greatness as a Catholic novelist.¹⁰ The new tone was confirmed—almost “miraculously” as it seemed to some readers—by *Le Mystère Frontenac* (1933), a story which has its origins in Mauriac’s very severe illness of the previous year (in the course of which a vocal cord had to be removed,

leaving his voice permanently impaired) and in the kindness which he then received. This largely autobiographical, nostalgic hymn to the Family suggested that an oasis had at last been found in the "desert of love" and that Mauriac and his background had finally been reconciled.

While this was not perhaps entirely the case, it is certain that Mauriac now emerges as an established writer seeing himself as answerable to a given readership, rather than a novelist fighting out his problems in projection from book to book before a partly hostile audience. In 1932 he was elected President of the Société des Gens de Lettres and in 1933, at the early age of forty-eight, he was elected to the Académie Française (a translation which he in conversation jocularly ascribes to the severe illness already mentioned and to the calculation of the Immortals that they would "get him alive," but not for too long). His celebrity now assisting him to use his talents more directly in the service of his faith, he broadened the scope of his influence considerably: contributing regularly first to *L'Écho de Paris* and then to *Le Figaro*, starting the publication of his *Journal* from 1934 onwards, and trying to reach a wide audience in 1936 with his *Vie de Jésus*. His portrait of a violent Christ is somewhat reminiscent of Chesterton's impression:

. . . not in the least of a man with his hair parted in the middle or with his hands clasped in appeal, but of an extraordinary being with lips of thunder and acts of lurid decision.¹¹

However, the violence of Mauriac's passionate, illogical, and irritable figure was suggestive rather of human love than divine and not everyone resisted the temptation to say that, not content with what he had achieved in his life of Racine, he was making yet another attempt at a self-portrait. In Church circles the work was criticised—courteously—for the literalness of its reading of the New

Testament, for the Jansenist colouring of its treatment of Grace, and for Mauriac's curious insistence, in lending to Jesus something of the hatred of Family and Pharisee found in his own work, upon Christ's coolness towards his mother.¹² Mauriac, however, while maintaining that for him the humanity of Christ was fundamental, went a long way towards meeting these criticisms for a new edition in the same year, and the work was widely recognised to be a valuable service to the faith.

In the field of fiction, Mauriac's work was now less controversial than before. Avoiding provocative situations and descriptions, he had begun to write more elaborate novels studying salvation in relation to certain broad themes: the problem of evil and, indeed, diabolic possession in *La Fin de la nuit* (1935) and *Les Anges noirs* (1936), of vocation in *Les Chemins de la mer* (1939), and of hypocrisy in *La Pharisienne* (1941). He was also led towards the theatre by various factors—including what he saw as the inherent problems of the novel of salvation and the desire for self-renewal—and the first of his four plays, *Asmodée*, had a very successful *première* at the Comédie Française in the autumn of 1937. He remained active as an imaginative writer into the early 1950s and in 1952 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature: "for the penetrating analysis of the soul and the artistic intensity with which, through the medium of the novel, he has interpreted human life."

The winner of the Nobel Prize, however, was already a rather different man from the novelist of the Stockholm citation. In a long passage in his *Bloc-Notes*, in which he describes his gradual involvement in public affairs, Mauriac tells how he felt bowed down beneath his great prize, how he longed for the chance to justify it, to turn it into a beginning rather than accept it as an ending:

And then I was struck by a coincidence. I received the Nobel Prize on the day, almost at the very hour that

an unhappy crowd in Casablanca was walking straight into the ambush laid for it. I returned to find that an irrefutable dossier had been brought to me, as if in answer to my secret prayer amid the pomp of Stockholm. . . . Henceforth, I was committed.¹³

And Mauriac now entered upon what was to be in many ways the most influential phase of his career, as a commentator on affairs rather than as an imaginative writer. Although he has remained a solitary figure—the liberal member of a largely conservative Church, the Catholic adherent to a largely secular Left—Mauriac for more than a decade has been one of the notable figures in the public life of his country. At a time of political and moral disarray, this perhaps more open and, in many ways, more attractive figure has come into his own as an independent observer and a cruel chronicler of his time. If he has excited hatred as well as respect, the “grating old weathercock” has always been heard.¹⁴

The gradual shift in Mauriac's interests is already apparent from the mid-1930s onwards in *La Vie de Jésus*, which had suggested that he was not prepared outside the field of moral issues to become a mere conformist, and in the *Journal*, which showed him turning aside increasingly from the provincial life nourishing the novels in an attempt to come to grips with the greater world outside. “I began to grow away from fiction at the time of the Spanish Civil War,” he says in *L'Express* for 5 Apr. 1957. “Until then I had been living in a kind of dream, in a kind of fictitious world.” That the novelist in Mauriac should be superseded in this way is natural enough. His fiction had corresponded essentially to the drive to resolve in projection his own deep private problems; it sprang, as he says to-day, “not from the part of me that was pure, but from the part that was wounded.” The narrow religion dominating his early life had placed the emphasis almost exclusively upon individual salvation,

and the overriding emotional dilemma behind the novels tends to be established within this vertical perspective rather than related morally to the world at large—that he should be content to project the problem repeatedly against the same Bordeaux backcloth is eloquent enough. Once the problem has been superseded, however, and with the events of the late 1930s forcing themselves harshly upon the attention, Mauriac, from dismissing the world with a Pascalian phrase, comes to examine it more closely, to seek to relate himself to it, to understand.

After some initial hesitation at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, he came out strongly against what he was later to call “the fatality which tends in France to bind the cause of the Church to that of the Right.”¹⁵ While the exclamatory lyricism of Claudel was merging with the thunderbolts in *L'Écho de Paris* of Général de Castelnau (the memory of this formidably moustached and bemedalled figure still brings a tremor to Mauriac's voice) in presenting the Franquist cause as a new Christian crusade against barbarism, Mauriac became a spokesman of the liberal element within Catholic opinion. In *Temps Présent* and in *Le Figaro*, he bestowed his delicately cruel irony upon the “noble crusader” and deplored “the appalling disaster that for millions of Spaniards Christianity and Fascism henceforth mean one and the same thing.”¹⁶ When the conflict became global and brought with it the occupation of France, he showed courage in writing—under the fairly transparent pseudonym of Forez—a clandestine pamphlet, *Le Cahier noir* (1943) in which, for all his pessimism, he attempts a statement of faith in man. After the Liberation he followed a generous impulse in pleading for the lives of Robert Brasillach and others, condemned to death for collaboration. And then, as he tells us, lulled into a false sense of security by the ascent to power of the Christian Democrat party, the Mouvement Républicain Populaire, he “fell asleep.”¹⁷

The awakening was to be unkind. And from now on his journalism acquires its distinctive cutting edge and its real bitterness. In 1954 we find him writing:

This history at once criminal and inept, this history of a decade written in red ink has been written by Christians, by the men whose arrival in power after the Liberation filled me with joy and pride. . . . In my view, the Christian Democrats in power have betrayed their vocation, which was to make manifest the truth that politics cannot fail to come under moral law. The men of the M.R.P., having become the masters, have flouted it—and at such a time! At the very historic moment when it was given to them to demonstrate it in all its force, when history was in some sense vindicating God since political truth for France—in Indo-China, Morocco and Tunisia—was justice.¹⁸

Not only the M.R.P., however, but the whole “ballet” of the Fourth Republic came under fire in these *Bloc-Notes* prominently displayed on the back page of *L'Express* every Friday. And so we have, disarmingly interspersed with waves of humility and meditations upon the Christian mysteries, a set of definitively destructive images of the men of the hour—Joseph Laniel as immobile as some massive gold ingot, Georges Bidault as the wolf with the lamb's face pacing up and down the Quai d'Orsay waiting for Mendès-France to be brought down, Guy Mollet as a bargain-basement plastic prime minister or, at moments when Mauriac did not feel called upon to stretch his bow, the picture conveyed by such a relaxed understatement as “le jeune Monsieur Gaillard.” The targets were tempting ones, and Mauriac has often had occasion to reproach himself sorrowfully for the sharpness of his arrow and the accuracy of his aim.

This picture changed sharply with the arrival in power of De Gaulle in the ambiguous circumstances of 1958. The public now had the piquant spectacle of Mauriac

continuing for some time to write in *L'Express* even after his support for the President had placed him in direct conflict with the editorial line of the paper. He had a long-standing admiration for the man whom he had years before described as "that Frenchman who through some mysterious predestination received as part of his inheritance the very name of old Gaul," and he has consistently defended him, not only because he believed in the elevation of his aims, but on the grounds that the political situation left France no alternative.¹⁹ Under the pressure of events Mauriac's support for De Gaulle has not gone without sacrifices—he disappointed some by not protesting more forcefully against torture in Algeria, notably in the case of Djamilia Boupacha.²⁰ Yet this in itself indicates the qualities for which he had come to stand: honesty and the rejection of expediency.

Mauriac's unusual brand of journalism is obviously open to criticism. It might be objected that his approach is negative and often facile in that it tends to personalise issues instead of submitting them to systematic analysis. It might well be said that there is a highly romantic element in his option for the lonely man above the battle, whether Mendès-France or De Gaulle (two men who stand, positively, for very different political conceptions). Yet these criticisms, however true, tend by their very nature to miss the real savour of Mauriac's situation: the paradox that his apparent limitations were very largely the source of his strength. He had no system, but then he was proud of having no system; and in a situation where the centre parties were merely governmental and administrative, where the Socialist Party was not recognisable as such, and where the Communist Party was earnestly elaborating such theories as "the absolute impoverishment of the proletariat," he contrived to manage without one—when ideological positions are either ignored or collapsing in the face of the facts, a little flair and a little simplicity go a long way. His defence of De Gaulle, when

not sentimental, was indeed a negative one, but he was in effect, and very reasonably, placing the onus upon a totally disorganised Left to offer a concrete alternative. Again, if for the greater part of this period he appeared to be feeding upon the disasters of the Fourth Republic, this was certainly preferable to refusing to recognise the reality of these disasters. That Mauriac's articles should have been read so widely is in itself a significant comment on the time. For it is precisely because he presented himself as the ordinary man reacting to events that he was often such a formidable figure—precisely because he was a Catholic and a *grand bourgeois* rather than a born democrat that he was such a thorn in the flesh of the M.R.P. and the Right. With considerable courage—in the face of a great many angry and threatening letters—Mauriac defended his tragic Christianity in the marketplace. And he is one of the relatively small number of public figures to emerge from the period with his dignity intact.

For all his prominence since the War in the field of political polemic, it is clear that Mauriac's reputation must ultimately rest upon his achievement as an imaginative writer. And here we encounter a sharp conflict of opinion.

In considering the violent, often confused controversy surrounding Mauriac's work, it is important to distinguish two levels of criticism. The first of these corresponds to a debate, largely internal to Church opinion, about the religious orthodoxy of the novels—a debate which has called forth separate studies such as the comprehensive survey of R. J. North.²¹ Mauriac's dark view of life was often condemned on theological grounds as "Jansenist"—after the influential reformist movement of the seventeenth century, finally condemned by Rome, which took the intransigent, Augustinian-type view that the Fall had brought about the *radical* corruption of man, thus leaving him helpless, whether by faith or by good deeds, to work

towards his own salvation. This approach amounted in effect to predestination: salvation, if granted to a man, came independently of his moral effort as the gratuitous gift of a God operating according to an unfathomable design. Jansenism tended consequently to diminish the role of the Church and it conflicted sharply with the orthodox doctrine of sufficient grace and free will defended by the Jesuits. Many critics saw in Mauriac's work this pessimistic emphasis on the world as a place of sin, on the corruption of human nature, the helplessness of the individual and the "miraculous" character of Grace. But not only did they find it spiritually depressing, they found it morally disturbing. Within the social context of the time, Mauriac's insistence on the theme of sexual passion seemed scandalous, and his treatment of it suggestive. The constant implied criticism of the *bourgeois* Catholic family—and it is true that Mauriac's writings might be seen as one of the major attacks on middle-class marriage mounted in this century—seemed wantonly corrosive. His novels appeared, in a word, to be theologically false and—more immediately vexing—morally dangerous.

When one reviews the relations between Mauriac and his critics, in the middle and late 1920s in particular, one has the impression of a running dog-fight—beginning with René Doumic's observation, when giving him the Academy's prize for *Le Désert de l'amour*, that he had so far confined his talent to depicting diseased persons, weaklings, and monsters. Thus we have Amoudru, in posing "le cas Mauriac" in *La Croix*, referring to "these monomaniacs of the sexual life"; Johannet asking whether Mauriac is a Catholic or an anti-Catholic writer; Rousseaux warning of the dangers of emptying the universe of all spiritual life; Eugène Charles, in a systematic exploration in *La Revue apologetique* of "this desert in which our Catholicism is dying of thirst," writing about Mauriac's "flair de chien" and invoking against him the

decisions of the Council of Trent.²² On the other hand we have Mauriac, privately uneasy, concerned lest there might be something sinful in the very act of rendering a sinful world, yet feeling that he must be free to express himself as an artist. "I thought" he says to-day, "that simply by writing as a Catholic, with the problems of the Catholic, I could do something useful and valid." He was not merely passive in this confrontation, however. If he was fearful of scandal, he was also tempted to dramatise the scandal; if his Prefaces tended to be prudent or apologetic, they were on occasion—as with the Preface to *Thérèse Desqueyroux*—highly provocative apologies; if *Dieu et Mammon* is to a large extent his novelist's *mea culpa*, it also contains a slashing passage about the Philistinism of critics and churchmen alike. Indeed it must have been something of a relief to both parties when the battle was ended and the truce drawn up.

In the face of this confrontation, one is divided. On the one hand, the Jesuit criticism of the imbalance of Mauriac's "Jansenist" world was largely justified. Again, one cannot condemn any group within a society for defending its beliefs and its moral interests as it sees them—just as long as this activity is not taken to be literary criticism in its full and proper sense. Many of these casual commentaries, curiously, took Mauriac's artistry for granted, indeed almost complained about it, before proceeding to attack him on moral and religious grounds. Many failed to respect the specific tenor of these novels, which is often poetic and symbolical, and were in effect treating works of imagination as commodities in being concerned only with their immediate impact upon a particular readership. Not a few confused the maintenance of religious truths with the preservation of a particular social and moral order, and most proceeded from an abstraction in that they started with an assumption concerning "the Catholic novel." While they may be useful for very general classification, such terms as "the

Catholic novel," "the liberal novel," or "the Communist novel" are strictly misnomers, almost to the point of self-contradiction: the novel, in that it persuades rather than argues, and persuades outwards from the particular of individual experience, can never adequately be viewed as the expression of a collective orthodoxy. However provocative he may have seemed to some of his co-religionists, Mauriac wins our sympathy for his artistic situation if only because he himself never failed to see these distinctions. As he says to-day (and as he said then): "I am not a Catholic novelist; I am a Catholic who writes novels."

As Mauriac, after the accolade of Du Bos and others, moved into the modified manner of the later novels and avoided giving offence at the immediately moral level, the controversy gradually receded—even if, in 1946, we find Alain Palante expressing surprise at this new tolerance of official Catholic circles towards an author who, famous or not, gives only a "derisory picture" of the human drama and the Christian life.²³ The eclipse of the "scandal," however, was to reveal a more significant division of opinion about Mauriac—this time with regard to the literary value of his work. The deep sense of destiny which had previously been attacked on theological grounds was now attacked on specifically artistic grounds by Jean-Paul Sartre. In a celebrated, systematic onslaught on the sequel to the story of Thérèse Desqueyroux, *La Fin de la nuit* (1935)—a novel described by another critic, Georges Hourdin, as "a kind of Racinian masterpiece"²⁴—Sartre rejected what he called "a Destiny which envelops and transcends the individual character," saw the characters as mere puppets, found the whole work angular and unreal, and concluded with the words: "God is not an artist, and neither is Monsieur Mauriac."²⁵ Extremely provocative though it was, this article of 1939 opened up the possibility of a most fruitful debate on the aesthetics of the novel and paved the way

—at the very least antithetically—for a more accurate assessment.

Within this perspective, French criticism of Mauriac—vast as it is—may seem somewhat disappointing. As is often the case, the major studies sometimes seem less revealing than the occasional piece by a Jean Prévost or a Gabriel Marcel.²⁶ Nelly Cormeau provides a lengthy analysis of the thematic structure of the work, but her tone is often so uncritical as to be gushing and her ardent appendix on “an opinion of M. Sartre” hardly seems to come to terms with the problems involved.²⁷ Georges Hourdin’s study, while it is often perceptive, also pursues a pre-established schema of Mauriac’s development without confronting it sufficiently closely with the fictional reality of the work.²⁸ Alain Palante is in some ways more satisfying, even if one cannot accept his overall assumptions. He provides an insight into “the myth of youth” and into the poetic nature of the Mauriac novel, while he also argues—interestingly, since the novels of the 1920s often give the impression, not so much of revolt as of the dramatising of the *possibility* of revolt—that there is no real religious doubt in Mauriac, that “his faith is absolute.”²⁹ To these accounts should be added those of Bendz, who offers a suggestive study of Mauriac’s language, and of Moloney, who examines the field of symbolism of the writings.³⁰ With Pierre-Henri Simon, however, we are aware of the faint embarrassment which can accompany criticism of a living writer in a compact literary world. Simon begins with important reservations with regard to:

... certain over-familiar processes of his art, certain *a priori* assumptions in his psychology, a certain way of representing Christianity in the extreme severity of its theology only to seize somewhat facile compromises with middle-class morality the very next moment. . . .³¹

These considerations are not very concretely related to

the central arguments, however, and this intelligent study remains a rather general presentation.

If there appears to be something of a gap in France between common opinion of Mauriac's work and the standard or, as one is tempted to write, the semi-official view, it is probably because those who tend to reject Mauriac—and Sartre's famous attack made it rather too easy to reject him out of hand—are content simply to disregard him, thus leaving the field to more involved commentators. Inevitably, a strong reaction has set in, particularly in this country with the highly perceptive shorter studies of two critics: that of Conor Cruise O'Brien (writing at the time as "Donat O'Donnell") in his study of a group of Catholic novelists entitled *Maria Cross*, and that of Martin Turnell in his collection *The Art of French Fiction*.³² Neither interpretation may be acceptable in its entirety, but it is clear that O'Brien and Turnell are attempting a broader judgment and moving towards the overall assessment which is perhaps, by now, overdue—in particular, both critics see Mauriac's turning-point in mid-career not as the moment of his flowering as a great novelist, but as the beginning of a gradual decline in his creative work. In other commentaries, however, the new critical tendency would seem to have become unduly destructive—even in the frequently stimulating study of Martin Jarret-Kerr, who writes as an Anglican. He is very much at ease in demonstrating Mauriac's weakness as an apologetic novelist and he suggests that:

Mauriac's sinners are frequently not sinners at all, or not sinners in the particular aspects that he underlines, but unreal characters seen through a sombre lens.³³

Yet his method does not allow him to examine individual works in any detail, it is rather disappointing that he should feel able to salvage only a few disparate elements at the end of his damaging survey, and it is surprising

that he should isolate as the most totally successful achievement *Le Mystère Frontenac*—which is certainly the least representative of the mature novels and which is surely, also, a sentimental work. While many of us cannot agree with some of the eulogists that Mauriac's psychology is the most penetrating to be found in French literature since the *grand siècle*, the pendulum is here moving too far in the other direction.

It is clear, therefore, that for the various reasons indicated Mauriac constitutes a critical problem. The present brief study attempts to bring out the specific nature of his imaginative writing and, initially, to identify the kind of writer with whom we are concerned. It will try to respect the different phases of his career and, by examining in greater detail at least three or four of his novels, argue the high quality of his achievement at certain moments. While there are indeed moments when Mauriac's dark art of destiny may reel melodramatically towards absurdity, this knowledge should not prevent us from recognising that, in certain circumstances, it can produce writing at once powerful and beautiful. If the price of demonstrating the latter is a degree of frankness concerning the former, a little frankness may not seem amiss. Mauriac himself is not temperamentally incapable of seeing his own critics in some perspective—in particular, he is very largely prepared in conversation to accept Sartre's criticisms, at least with respect to much of the later work—and his pleasure at his success as a man of letters has never been exempt from the requisite modicum of irony. It is after all hardly surprising that this particular prizewinner should believe that, in literature as elsewhere, the real prize comes afterwards.

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CHAPTER II

THE WORLD AND THE INSTINCTIVE WRITER

The major novelist—a Faulkner, a Lawrence, a Malraux—tends not so much to render the world as to inflect the world: to use it as a means of persuasion in the objectivising of a private vision. In the case of Mauriac this is particularly true.

He describes himself to-day as an “instinctive writer,” thus echoing his statement to Frédéric Lefèvre in 1923 that his writing was “entirely subconscious.”¹ He says that, if he was never horrified by what he wrote, he was often surprised. He wrote extremely fast—in some cases completing the draft of a novel in three weeks—and, as indeed some of his hasty endings suggest, he was never very concerned with the deliberate ordering of the structure of his work. His use of the symbol, for example, was natural rather than meditated. Control, in the Mauriac novel, is purely organic, and quality a function of the intensity of concentration upon a theme. His approach to the novel is that of the poet drawing fables from a precise field of experience protected from the relative world by the force of its original impact upon the mind.

It is ironical—and, in the event, doubly ironical—that Mauriac, so deeply resentful of Freud, should so often define his own creative enterprise in Freudian terms. He has frequently suggested that his work reflects a private situation and, in *La Vie de Jean Racine*, he writes: “the creative impulse impels us to bring forth and give form to the darkest, most disturbed part of ourselves.”² His

own imaginative writing is, indeed, a transcendent attempt at self-liberation through projection, and his dependence upon the provincial *locale* of Bordeaux and the surrounding countryside is his dependence upon the context in which, in early life, the fundamental conflicts were laid down and the knot tied. In an interview with Malcolm Cowley, he puts the matter very succinctly:

I don't observe and I don't describe: I rediscover. I rediscover the narrow Jansenist world of my devout, unhappy and introverted childhood. It is as though when I was twenty a door within me had closed for ever upon that which was going to become the material of my work.³

Mauriac's writings will be an attempt, at the deeper level, to open this door, to achieve continuity between childhood and the greater field of experience. In Paris, he will devote his energies to escaping from Bordeaux—and he will escape, in the end, only by accepting it, by returning to it.

Before attempting to sketch the landscape of Mauriac's world within world, it may be convenient to indicate the way in which it relates to the world itself. For even the "instinctive writer"—if only through rejection, in order to define and defend his chosen field of exploration—must in some manner come to terms with the historical world. And, indeed, to recognise the nature of his enterprise as an imaginative writer is to explain much that may generally seem confused and negative in Mauriac.

It explains, for example, why his field of sympathy should initially be so restricted, or why a Catholic writer should be tied to the depiction of an outmoded provincial expression of his faith which, as Gabriel Marcel has suggested, is more of a sociological than a religious phenomenon.⁴ It explains why reality, for this author who has lived in Paris for most of his life, should be vested not in Paris but in the murmuring pines of the Landes

and the gloomy middle-class houses of the Bordeaux of seventy years ago—the Paris of the novels is often little more than ideographic, a back-cloth of the modern Babylon, a cardboard City of Sin. For the bondage to the *locale* and to the intensity of early life tends inevitably, by an instinctive process of self-justification, to go hand in hand with the denial of what lies without. And, indeed, Mauriac appears for much of his career to be led obscurely to protect his childhood in time as well as in place: if his Paris is unreal it is largely because it is for him an image of the unreality and the horror of the contemporary world. The year 1914 was clearly a watershed in Mauriac's life, the end of a world in which it was still possible to live with some simplicity and completeness. "All our ills" he says, "stem from that time."

Underlying the novels and emerging in exclamations of disbelief in the *Journal* in the 1930s, there is the deep sense that the contemporary world—"this mechanical civilisation that is destructive of the spirit"⁵—is close to being one vast, materialistic, "Freudian" nightmare. One simple instance springs to mind in this connexion. In 1923, he asks Lefèvre:

Are you not struck more and more by the devaluation of woman as she becomes more pagan: this is leading us into a new world, a barbarous world. . . .⁶

And he will still say in conversation that "the situation of the young woman of to-day is appalling." Now it might surely be thought that one of the positive aspects of Western society in this century—particularly, perhaps, in a country where women did not receive the vote until 1946—was precisely the constitution of women as persons, equal in dignity and in the opportunity for self-fulfilment, and that this was a greater human achievement than the "respect for ladies" and the *femme-objet* of the Belle Époque. The judgment might seem to come strangely from a man who in his later years made such an im-

pressive attempt to understand the world, and, above all, from a novelist whose central theme was for so long the escape from the solitude and the unreality of the older society towards self-realisation. In the face of the world, the instinctive writer tied to childhood tends, for all his intelligence, to be a man divided—and a man alone.

This division and this solitude are perhaps most significantly seen in Mauriac's relations with his Church—the most sensitive area of adjustment for the instinctive writer tied to a Catholic childhood. In the recent *Ce que je crois* (1962) we find him writing:

I can only speak for myself and it may be that others, many others, do not find what I have myself experienced throughout my life within the Visible Church—the feeling of an increased human solitariness.⁷

He believes that this may have been his own fault. Nevertheless, he suggests later on in the same work that he would have felt alone even had he been an active worker in the Church, not only because solitude is part of the destiny of all men but because it is specific and central to his own private destiny:

I shall have been inspired in the domain of literary creation as in the domain of prayer because I have been alone, and because my loneliness has known no other remedy than writing in this world and God in the other.⁸

He writes constantly about the “affective nature” of his faith and—almost coquettishly at moments—about his instinctive aversion to theology. This he tends to justify—in a somewhat negative way, perhaps—by suggesting that the historical problems raised by the Modernist crisis at the turn of the century led him to look elsewhere than in theology for the foundation of his faith.⁹ This foundation, however, as has already emerged,

did not lie for him in the historical Church. In fact, he has no particular admiration for the structures of the Church as such, he deplores much of its secular involvement in his own time as throughout history, he is dismayed by its internal divisions and he is personally unhappy about "the complicity of our Church with the lowest forms of devotion."¹⁰ Within the public Church, he remains the solitary private man. He relates his belief to the tradition essentially through a direct sense of fellowship with the historical Christ and he everywhere insists upon the irrationality, the "madness" of faith. As he writes in his *Sainte Marguerite de Cortone*:

But in the end we must always come back to the little book full of words that (to human understanding) are absurd, full of stories at once adorable and revolting.¹¹

Faith, for Mauriac, is a passionate leap above Church and theology, so that the touchstone of truth comes, inevitably, to lie in intensity of feeling.

It is for this reason that the apologetic writings so often seem confused, that a piece such as *La Pierre d'achoppement* seems so extraordinarily embarrassed—*Ce que je crois*, indeed, might seem to be moving precisely because of its weakness at the intellectual level. For in Mauriac the apologetic can never stray far from the autobiographical—the passionate faith can appeal only to actual experience. At times he toys with the conception of a physical state of grace; always he is eager for the visible sign. In *Ce que je crois* he refers to several moments in the resolution of the crisis of the late 1920s when he felt himself possessed by God. Essentially, however, he comes back to the finality of childhood—how many times has he throughout his career transcribed or transposed the indelible memories of the *première communion* or the Corpus Christi procession? The need of the visible sign might seem to correspond to the desire to perpetuate the privileged moments of solid illumination and self-coincidence when

the child felt totally justified in the eyes of the world and of God.

"For of such is the kingdom of heaven. . . ." In this instance, perhaps, ambivalently: the religion authenticates the childhood, the childhood authenticates the religion. And the circle is closed, the apotheosis reached, in some astonishing and beautiful pages of the profoundly meditated *Mémoires intérieurs* of 1959, where we find the old man dreaming of going up to God clasping in his arms the child François Mauriac of seventy years ago:

We shall go up together in search of the source. We shall come to it far beyond these poor shop-windows and the smell of wet pavements, beyond the vast estuary, beyond the ocean that erodes the dunes. We shall go up together to the source of our joy. Eternal childhood of God!¹²

And a few pages earlier he has written, in one simple sentence:

Childhood is the whole of a life, in that it provides us with the key.¹³

"My devout, unhappy and introverted childhood. . . ." It is for obvious reasons difficult to quarrel with Mauriac's description, in his interview with Cowley, of his own childhood. Devout and introverted it clearly was. To say that it was unhappy, however, might tend to simplify the issue. In fact, his mother seems to have rendered his childhood within the family almost too happy. The problem was rather that this exalted happiness could not be related to the world immediately surrounding him—and that it was not easily to be superseded, ultimately, in the larger world of experience. It was a black-and-white rather than a grey childhood, one marked by a central imbalance, a basic insecurity which inevitably called forth compensatory absolute states of certainty and self-identity.

A frail, timid boy, nicknamed after a drooping eyelid resulting from an accident, the schoolboy felt himself disregarded by class-mates and teachers alike; only the thought of the joyful return home to his mother sustained him. Again, while the prudent middle-class Mauriac family was a wealthy one, with timber, wine, and property interests, he was to discover that it was still a far cry socially from the prosperous families of the "wine aristocracy" and the industries connected with the port—not for Mauriac the relaxed confidence and the easy "English" ways of his young contemporaries at the *Club Primrose*. This sense of separateness could only be enhanced by the almost hallucinatory rigour of the pious observances of the home, where the children went to sleep with their arms folded in the shape of a cross and where the sight or even the thought of one's own body could bring about eternal damnation.¹⁴ And this stern law brooked no opposition, for it was a natural and a just law: the law of the "Jansenist" mother whom the child loved passionately and upon whom his emotional dependence was almost total. This dependence sprang largely from the absence of the father, who had died when Mauriac was only twenty months old, and it was consecrated by the fact that this lost father, in that he had been an unbeliever, seemed doubly lost: mysteriously alien to the truth emanating from the warm-hearted, intensely scrupulous mother. In this situation, the mother became the incarnation of truth at all levels. She was both mother and father to this fatherless boy—mother in that her love provided a total refuge, father in that this very love was fused with the idea of a hard duty sanctioned by the terrible authority of an inscrutable God. Mother and father and vehicle of the divine, she governed that world and the next, and it is understandable that the child should have found separation from her unendurable. So it was that, dominated by the unified drama of mother-love and individual salvation, this unilinear little

world of childhood vibrated to the sense of "an eternity gambled at every moment."¹⁵ It was here that Mauriac oscillated to the pendulum of guilt and redemption, and learnt the love and the terror—fused at certain moments in church into an "amorous terror"¹⁶—which were to become the poles of his sensibility.

The world, however, lived on an intermediate level between these poles, and Mauriac's discovery of it was to be painful.

As he advanced into a passionate adolescence—the permanent preoccupation with purity balanced by the enchantments of the liturgy—he discovered the inhabitants of Bordeaux almost as another species. The activities of his contemporaries at the *Club Primrose* seemed laden with mystery, the Quinconces Fair seemed to embody Temptation, the fact that the Carnival traditionally took place on Ash Wednesday meant the horror of masked revellers ritually endangering their immortal souls—the whole city seemed frighteningly to magnify the obsessive private conflict between Sin and Grace. For the guilt-ridden innocent, the mystery of human life coincided with the mystery of sin. Mauriac's mother had perhaps insulated him so thoroughly against the world through the agency of this self-protective fear that he was unable to see the world, let alone come to terms with it. There was at least no easy resolution to the conflict of passions making up his "secret drama":

... passions of which the love of God and my mad desire for purity and inner perfection were not the least demanding; but also the pride and the shame I felt at being so different, so inexplicable; and the despairing timidity of the adolescent who has the sense of his own almost infinite value but who discovers, at the same time, that this value has no currency among men.¹⁷

In Bordeaux, as it was dramatised by this boy who was

driven to pinch his cheeks in front of the mirror and repeat passionately "me, me, me!", there was no room for a Mauriac.

Inevitably, he reacted. Yet his situation was so vulnerable, and he had so little purchase on the real world outside that the area of self-assertion was necessarily small. As he came to see his mother's piety in some perspective, he asked himself whether his religion was not the effect of circumstance—indeed Mauriac has since asked himself in a number of essays whether his life would not have been very different had he, for example, lost his mother in infancy rather than his free-thinking father. However, these speculations were vain in themselves and, it would seem, too dangerously close to betrayal of the mother for there to be any real rebellion behind them. There was rather a kind of passive frustration—to which Mauriac frequently refers—at never having been free to *choose* this religion into which he felt forced by birth, a perhaps somewhat romantic resentment at having to be one of the "ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance," the elder rather than the prodigal son.

Yet Mauriac already knew that he was a Catholic for ever, that he belonged to

the race of those who, born into Catholicism, realise on the verge of manhood that they can never break away from it, that they are not free to leave or come back to the fold. [. . .] The more I shook what I took to be bars, the more immovable I found them to be.¹⁸

Was it, perhaps, because he knew them to be immovable that he ventured to shake them at all? Certainly, the brief anti-clerical phase never affected the main issue. The "secret wish" at this time of the writer who will later, in *Ce que je crois* and elsewhere, reproach himself anxiously for his self-protective prudence in life was not the rebellious desire to lose his faith; it was the desire to achieve the rather sophisticated compromise of losing his

faith in order freely to recover it.¹⁹ At a time of strain in the mid-1920s, Mauriac was to turn savagely upon his "cowardly, timorous, inward-turned adolescence" and the emotionalism of his religion:

As an adolescent I turned God into the accessory to my cowardice—and who knows but that this is the sin against the Spirit (. . .)? Woe betide the boy who had the nails, the sponge full of vinegar and the crown of thorns for his first *toys*.²⁰

Here, however, he might seem—characteristically, perhaps—to be going to the other extreme: the "trap" in which the boy felt himself imprisoned was not one from which it was easy to escape. Nevertheless it is clear that, by inflating the pathos of his situation and by dramatising the incompatibility between himself and a largely mythical Bordeaux, the young Mauriac was in effect keeping the real Bordeaux at arm's length. And in this situation a certain "Bordeaux"—taken to be life itself—necessarily became the villain of the piece.

So Mauriac now turned a cold eye, not upon those outside the pale of his experience—one can only satisfyingly attack the familiar—but upon the respectable, well-to-do, largely Catholic middle-class *milieu* in which he felt imprisoned. The undeviating glance with which he stalked sin within himself he turned cruelly outwards, upon those "lukewarm" Christians whose lives did not appear to be broken by the great internal struggle between sin and Grace, who seemed all too easily to reconcile God and Mammon. Beneath the calm surface of these respectable lives he divined scandal, hatred, hypocrisy. In the very churches serving this community he saw a symbolical opposition. The bare vault of the Cathedral where he himself would often seek refuge on his way home from the Faculté—if mocked at for talking to himself in the public park, he could fittingly talk to himself in prayer in the Cathedral—is contrasted with

the fashionable, comfortable, elegant, warm Notre-Dame, the church of those other Christians:

that holy middle class, concerned to overlook no benefit, to disdain no promise, to take no unnecessary risk—even on the metaphysical plane; a cautious, circumspect, sensible species, with all their insurance policies in order for this world and for eternity.²¹

Mauriac has identified the adversary: not so much the unbeliever—for the unbeliever sails in a different boat—but the false believer, the “Pharisee,” the fellow-passenger who seems to be enjoying the journey, the one who appears by some mysterious process of self-betrayal to have come to terms with the world.

A matrocentric childhood in which the mother is inextricably mingled with the idea of truth, the sense of emotional and spiritual security; a vertical polarity of sin and Grace absolutising the relative world as Temptation and eclipsing intermediate moral problems, individual or collective; a fear of life centred obsessively around sexual purity; a drive towards freedom and self-realisation formulating itself as the “secret wish” to be freely what one is already driven to be; the ambiguous, somewhat marginal conflict between the wounded adolescent and the “Pharisees” of “Bordeaux” . . . —the world upon which the door closed when Mauriac was twenty is clearly not the great world. Narrow as it is, however, the instinctive writer will contrive at times to give it great organic unity through a deep sense of destiny, and relate it resonantly to the world through a rare gift for sensuous and symbolical suggestion.

The background of the writings will essentially be Mauriac’s “inner Bordeaux” and inner landscape of the Landes, the great forest south of Bordeaux, of the turn of the century. Often it will be the city: the *bourgeois* interior, the latent violence underlying the silence of the evening meal, the adolescent pacing along the dark street

lit by the tempting café, the tram with its single headlight looming up like a Cyclops through the wet dusk to clatter away into the aching emptiness of the suburbs, the intimation of defeat amid the disturbing scent of the unseen sea. More profoundly, it will be the moaning forest, the ferns, the lakes, the sandy paths stretching away aimlessly through purple heather, the eloquent silence of the Landes. It was here, amid the bleeding pines of this lonely landscape, that the young Mauriac on holiday discovered the haunting beauty of sinful nature, the paganism of the blood—that he confirmed the fundamental ambiguity of the self. If they also derive from the classical tradition, the central terms of his symbolical vocabulary—desert, sand, fire, stifling, consuming; thirst, clear spring, storm, mud; hunt, prey; the sea, the last dune—are indigenous to the Landes. The very apparent confusion in his use of this imagery is artistically necessary to the almost Manichean vision in that it expresses the perfidious ambiguity of the world of appearances. The sun may ripen the grapes or it may consume the forest in fire, illumine the morning or inflame the afternoon with passion; the rain may nourish the earth or it may beat down the vines, refresh and console or undermine moral resistance; the wind from the sea may be the cooling, healing breeze from the eternity of God's love, or the hot breath of destruction and desire. This shimmering, whispering landscape, where the physical and the metaphysical appear to merge, will become an essential mythical setting for Mauriac. In this mysteriously beautiful yet mysteriously corrupted world that is hauntingly evocative of the duality of man's nature, he will find the very image of the Garden of Eden after the Fall. It is here that the poet-novelist, attuning his intensities and his time-levels to the inner rhythms of destiny, will come into his own.

The humanity of Mauriac's world will consist largely of the Pharisees, the Family, and a certain kind of

"youthful" one. The Pharisees will be seen with the clear-eyed cruelty of the child, attacked for their complacency, their hypocrisy, their snobbery, their corruption of the community of Christ. To the Family, if only because it must be attacked from within, the attitude will be more ambivalent. Nevertheless, we are everywhere aware of it as a crippled social unit—Mauriac frequently reproduces, directly or in inverted form, the imbalance of his own family, while nowhere is there a central family founded upon a happy marriage. The Family blends the destructive: the recurring figure of the domineering mother, the jealous brother, with the fossilised: the old aunt, the effete uncle. By its very nature, however, it tends to be destructive of individuality. Its tradition of ownership and its hereditary patterns of behaviour or disease taint human relationships within it, compel each new generation to submit, inflect the individual into conformity with the myth. The Family, in the work of this divided instinctive writer whose own family appears to have been a united one, is the very form of the destiny of heredity and environment, a continuing human disaster. For the Family is old and the hero, in Mauriac, is "young."

The basic classification of humanity in Mauriac is a metaphysical one. On the one hand there are those who have accepted the world, whether the Pharisee, the routine Christian whose "deaf soul" gets no response from God, or the old and the average who either become part of the family furniture or implement its mystique in domination, acquisitiveness, or simple gluttony. On the other hand, there are those who, consciously or not, are living against the world, the authentic few who are living the metaphysical mystery of their lives as individuals—we have, in effect, the election of the sinner or the saint. For in a world where the insistence upon the polarity of sin and redemption throws into shadow the horizontal levels of the moral, there will inevitably be a romantic reversibility of roles—the sinner and the saint,

as the two real possibilities of divided man, are brothers. And this black-or-white authenticity will be felt as a certain kind of youthfulness—the eyes of the lonely middle-aged man whose suffering harrows yet mysteriously preserves, of the artist of any age, of the enigmatically tragic priest, of the murderer on the run more from God than from men, will be young. In a climate of destiny where the Christian view of evil tends to submerge the Christian view of good, where the world, the flesh, and the devil are often felt as one, the protagonist will be the sinner. As Mauriac puts it, in writing of the “sulphurous light” in which his novels are bathed:

With the aid of a certain gift for creating atmosphere, I try to make the Catholic universe of evil palpable, tangible, odorous. While the theologians provide an abstract idea of the sinner, I give him flesh and blood.²²

The world of the sinner-protagonist will be a world of destiny.

The destiny which makes Mauriac's writing dramatic—and which, when he does not establish it in sufficiently concrete terms within the fictional approach he is adopting, makes it melodramatic—is not merely an idea. More than a structural principle or a theological conception conveyed through a symbolical backcloth, it is the form, the idiom, the very meaning of human life. “We weave our own destiny” he writes in *La Vie de Jean Racine*, “we draw it forth from within ourselves as the spider draws his web.”²³ A man is not so much living in the relativity of the world as creating, absolutely, his image for eternity:

He cannot yield to a desire, a pleasure or a pang of grief without working at his own statue and modifying it—for every touch counts. All the time it is taking shape. He can do nothing that is not added unto this

figure stalked by eternal reprobation or by eternal love.²⁴

Destiny is inherent in living as the meaning of living, every action involves the absolute—there is a sense in which there *is* no relative world for Mauriac. And not only do our sins catch up with us; they may even anticipate us. . . .

Describing Evil stalking its prey through “that state of innocence already pregnant with the sin to come,” Mauriac writes:

Outwardly, nothing is amiss; we are sitting smoking or glancing through a book, when our soul—unknown to all—is struck down and dies.²⁵

God, similarly, stalks the unwary soul: “God is patient, he knows where to lay the snare which will strangle the animal.”²⁶ If the destiny of the sinner-protagonist often seems pathetic rather than strictly tragic, it is because he is so frequently impotent in the face of the wiles of the Devil or of Grace. The “Jansenist” aspect of his situation is that he may appear to be a mere battlefield for a cosmic conflict which transcends his conscious personality and its moral awareness, a pawn in a momentous game. Morally responsible or not, he may yet be held responsible because of his corrupted nature, because he is himself his own fatality. Not only does destiny inhere in his every act; it precedes his every act. The relativity of the world is an illusion, a set of perfidious mirrors, a trap.

This stark, almost primitively immediate sense of fate would seem to be less the Christian view of fatality than, ultimately, a reflexion of the fact that, for this instinctive writer, Christianity itself was something of a private fatality. “A man,” as he writes in *Dieu et Mammon*, “may be the prisoner of a metaphysic with which, in his mind and in his body, he is in disagreement.”²⁷ In the early chapters of this work—which in the Preface to a recent

re-issue he offers as the most self-revealing pages he has ever written and the key to an understanding of his writings as a whole²⁸—he treats at some length the “drama” to which he refers elsewhere: the fact that he was *born into* Catholicism. These sincere and passionate pages, in one respect, make curious reading. While Mauriac is concerned with showing that he was aware of the conditioning “stamp” of Catholicism and that he examined and controlled his reactions to his faith accordingly, the rather confused and cyclical nature of his argument would everywhere seem to be indicative of an emotional conditioning of some kind.

He makes it clear that the question of sexual purity was dominant in his awareness of his religion. Everything, after the onset of a passionate adolescence, crystallised around this issue:

That the God of the Christians demands everything, I knew. Pascal, with excessive and unjust rigour, had taught me that He makes no allowance for the flesh, that Nature and Grace are two worlds at war, and this seemed to me to be frighteningly obvious. . . . God would not allow me to let my thoughts linger, even for a second, upon that which my passion demanded. . . . I was torn by a single issue; I should have to resolve it by giving myself either to God or to the power beneath. There was no hope of escaping from these pincers, no possibility of abandoning the Christian framework. To be sure, this would have solved everything—others about me were going off on tiptoe or slamming the door behind them and remaking themselves in terms of another ethic. As for myself, I remained attached to the Church as closely as a man is attached to the planet. . . . My only recourse was to fling myself into literary creation—to give expression and tangible form to this monster which I could not vanquish.²⁹

So much is clear, and it is the case that for the greater

part of his career the central theme will be the conflict between sexuality and individual salvation. As he writes a little further on, having said that we all have our own "individual grief":

It is the privilege of artists to express theirs in its particularity and in its differences. It is that which creates their style, which gives it its unique tone, its specific and inimitable resonance.³⁰

Yet there is no trace in these chapters of any philosophical necessity binding him to his faith—or indeed of anything that may be generalised beyond his own circumstances. He confirms that he has never seriously been troubled by doubt: "deep down there reigns a calm certainty."³¹ And yet, by a strangely solipsistic, cyclical return, this certainty appears to be defined in terms of the "individual grief" itself. Asking himself how this "incorruptible element" of his faith may be defined, he writes: "It is something manifest: it is the Cross. We have only to open our eyes to see it beside us: *our* cross which awaits us."³² And a moment later he says that "one is born a prisoner of one's cross."³³ These self-revealing pages, ironically, would seem to reveal that the instinctive writer, outside the projection of fiction, cannot explain himself. What actually emerges would appear to be this. Mauriac is possessed of faith. Deep down his faith is unquestioned, nor can it be questioned since the prime aim in life is salvation beyond life—the primacy of salvation is strongly stressed and the relationship with the other implicit in sexuality is not discussed. In regard to living itself, however—particularly in regard to the basic drive governing the fundamental human relationship—the possession of the faith is tragic in its finality. Beyond time, the tragedy will be redeemed. Within time, it cannot be; the result at the immediate level of experience is separation from the world, from one's flesh, from oneself.

The stamp of this absolute perspective upon the mind is such that it cannot be abandoned. As Mauriac writes of himself: "I cannot leave the Church: the mesh of the net will not yield. If I tried to leave it, it would be to find it elsewhere."³⁴ For, ultimately, a man cannot escape from Christianity:

Of course he is at liberty to evade grace; but to lapse into sin is not to break away from Christianity—it is perhaps to tie oneself to it by even more formidable bonds. [. . .] The only way out, sin, is not at all an exit: it is a door which does not lead outside. [. . .] But neither doubt, nor negation, nor even denial could tear off this tunic that is stuck to their skin.³⁵

So it is that a man can only play at being the prodigal son. For the lost sheep are pursuing an illusion in thinking that they can stray away from home:

When they imagine that they have wandered far and wide and seen strange lands, they discover that they have merely been going round in circles, that they have been floundering around on the same spot.³⁶

Men, within this Pascalian view of the *divertissement*, will try to flee from their grief, to forget their cross. They may even lose sight of the "fearful sign in the sky," but the "mysterious threads" still bind them and they will be stopped in their tracks, drawn back to their cross:

And then, however far they have strayed, the bonds will bring them back with surprising strength. And again they find themselves mercifully flung against the timbers. Instinctively, they stretch out their arms, they offer their hands and their feet, pierced since childhood.³⁷

For the sinner-protagonist of the novels, also, there will be no escape from salvation or at least from the haunting dichotomy of sin and salvation—no escape,

amid the relative, from the destiny of the absolute. He is on a leash. The faster and the farther he runs, the harder the jolt. Obscurely, he knows this. As he runs feverishly away from his cross, he is also—necessarily and ambivalently—running feverishly towards the relief of the jolt, the abolition of the illusion of relativity and freedom, the sweet finality of his crucifixion.

Yet if the “stamp,” in the end, shines through Mauriac’s apologetic writings like a watermark, it is perhaps ultimately rather the outward form, the metaphysical justification of a deeper stamp—which may best be studied in the context of his work up to *Genitrix*.

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CHAPTER III

THE ROAD TO *GENITRIX*

It is only with *Le Baiser au lépreux* of 1922, which he himself sees as his first satisfactory novel, that Mauriac will, as it were, begin to speak with his own voice. Yet if the two volumes of poetry and the four novels produced up to that date must be seen as immature works, it is not so much because they are the writings of an author who has not yet "come to terms with the world"—it is rather, in this instance, because they are the writings of an author who still believes that he can come to terms with it. The concentration and the structural simplicity of *Le Baiser au lépreux* will spring from the fact that the poet of destiny has largely disengaged himself from the world, the decisive advance in technique will reflect a decisive stand in relation to experience. And for an understanding of this stand it is necessary to glance at these early writings.

The themes of the first two volumes of poetry, *Les Mains jointes* (1909) and *L'Adieu à l'adolescence* (1911), are solitude, nostalgia, the love of God, the aspiration towards human love. Faguet was charmed by the phenomenal freshness of the soul of the young poet:

It is very beautiful, this soul: very delicate, very pure, a shade feminine; it is deliciously *adolescent*. The bloom of the peach is there intact upon it; nothing has withered it, or even touched it.¹

The titles themselves—"De la Douceur du Passé," "Un Enfant triste se lève," "Grandes Vacances," "Le Vaincu"—convey something of the melancholy, Verlaine-like

complaint of the young man emerging slowly from an over-protected childhood to face the almost ontological leap into the world of maturity. And, inevitably, the moral equation which Mauriac will impose upon the world in his first two novels will be a fragile one. That the novels are projections of the same world emerges in a general similarity of theme, in the repetition of details—we have the same clock on the mantelpiece in each, the same fruit-tree, the same vision of the Temptress called Liette—and in the constant return to the room or the orchard consecrated by the reality of childhood. “Oh my childhood,” says the young hero of the first novel, “it is always to you that I return.”²

In this young man’s inability, in *L’Enfant chargé de chaînes* (1913), to come to terms with a democratic Christian movement called Amour et Foi, Mauriac is transposing his own difficulty in harmonising with Marc Sangnier and his movement Le Sillon. The satire remains inconclusive, however, and the main function of Amour et Foi within the novel is to emphasise the isolation of Jean-Paul—a literary, self-pitying young man who hardly conceals his vulnerability behind an aristocratic disdain. Having played the *enfant terrible* within the movement, he breaks away from the “rabble” and the “democratic rigmarole”³—only to turn, in despair at the egocentricity which makes self-renunciation impossible for him, towards “la vie de Paris.” He sets up Liette in a flat, but his “inexpressible disgust” leads him to attempt to resolve his spiritual and emotional instability through a return to the girl who has loved him since childhood—“for him, divine grace took the form of a human love.”⁴ The tender relationship of the engaged couple is authenticated by its childlike purity, by the manner in which it inscribes itself into the reality of the world of the *première communion*. Throughout the book, Jean-Paul has longed not so much to possess as to be possessed. The need to resolve this longing seems to inform the almost sacred gesture with

which—for the second time in the novel—he “lays his head against the dark dress of the young girl.”⁵ Jean-Paul had lost his mother: in Marthe he appears to have found her again.

La Robe prétexte (1914) is largely a return to childhood itself, reminiscent at moments of Proust and at others of Gide's *La Porte étroite*, which brings out the difficulty of superseding childhood. For the young man who eventually arrives in Paris and who, on his balcony—for the second time in the book—feels a mad desire to be applauded by the world, there will be nothing to rival the moment of power when he was the “little child who participated in the triumph of God” in the Corpus Christi procession:

Day of dazzlement! I advanced, hieratic, with leaves and roses trailing at my feet. . . . In the distance, I could see the crowd dropping to their knees at our approach; as we moved forwards, the bowed faces touched the ground.⁶

We again have the hatred of ordinary life and of those outside the enchanted non-involvement of youth, the foreknowledge that life is “brutal and soiled.”⁷ Inevitably, the profound innocence of these novels—where the naïvety of the notations does not create frankly comic effects—does not go without a certain unconscious vulgarity, most obviously seen in the blindness to the fact that the “Liettes” are also persons. Towards the end of *La Robe prétexte*, however, reality is finally knocking at the door in the form of a new and significant tension.

The hero once more is in effect an orphan. His mother has died early and his father—a Gauguin-like figure who went off long ago to paint the “unknown blue of the Tahitian night”—is a troubling, mysterious absence. The boy is thus left to the ministrations of the female Family: the domineering old “idol” of a grandmother, the abandoned aunt with her sore eyes and her passion for

bourgeois protocol, the austere, if mildly gluttonous nun attached to the grandmother, the unmarried poor cousin of the grandmother who must diet on humility. The childhood sweetheart is the cousin—which serves to underline the fact that, if only because of the social context of Mauriac's chosen world, the Family and marriage tend to be tantamount, morally, to the same thing. This time, however, the attempt of the would-be prodigal son to arrange life and the eventual return in advance and on his own terms meets with failure—there is no returning to close the cycle of childhood, family, and faith against the great world outside. For Camille has not grown into his dream of "the Christian virgin saying the evening prayer with simplicity before crossing the threshold into calm and sanctified delights" in marriage.⁸ Camille has grown up, already seems to have been tainted by life—she thinks he should be in a seminary, she tells him he is still a child. He feels passionately that the woman of the dream does exist: "for, better than other men, we who do not know evil understand the mystery of woman: we possess her, beyond all voluptuousness."⁹ But the "mystery of woman" is betrayed by woman. The attempt to reconstitute childhood, for all its contradictions, in the adult world collapses, and the chestnut-tree, as of old, receives his tears.

An attempt, however negative, to resolve the conflict between defiant innocence and the betrayal of woman, to "redeem" woman by making her realise the humiliation imposed upon her by her womanhood, is made in *La Chair et le sang*. In this novel he is attempting to broaden his scope. There is some humour and a new satirical strain—which involves some savage portraits of those who are not "youthful."¹⁰ Significantly, however, this attempt to achieve greater distance leads—as it will also lead in the next novel—to a romantically improbable plot which, in this novel, is governed by a strange saintly-or-sacrilegious pact between Claude and the debauched

Edward. *La Chair et le sang*, indeed, is the work of a profoundly divided man.

Why, since May and Claude love each other, should they not marry? One reason is simply that Claude is a social inferior and that Mauriac tends all-unconsciously to offer as a moral problem sanctioned by religion what is merely a class problem. The profounder reason is that Mauriac, in setting up his situation, needs the Christian marriage as a resolution—but seems to be able to integrate it morally only as the loveless marriage of renunciation within the structure of the Family. The ambiguous horror of sexuality reaches its climax in the Peeping Tom activities of Claude, who hates sexuality but who waits in the bushes transfigured by the desire to

feast his eyes upon the spectacle of the violation of a young body—hiding, fleeing, weeping at being forever doomed to daily outrage and nightly pollution.¹¹

Sexuality, in this novel, is an urgent reality. Since it cannot be integrated morally, it will be neutralised in a transcendent fashion: May will accept of Claude's physical desire only the divine grace which it appears to transmit.¹² Paradoxically, it is by her flight from her womanhood and from her individuality that May, morally, will carry the novel. She has made the humiliating discovery that she has instincts, that she is female—even within Christian marriage her self-disgust at her pleasure will drive her to her confessor. It is almost, indeed, as though she felt cheated of the completeness of her sacrifice of herself to the Castagnède family into which she has married. All her life she had laughed at the static, blinkered existence of this almost prototypical Family:

To-day, she no longer laughed at them. She aspired to that code, to that order and, above all, to that moral cleanliness, that dignity.¹³

In this novel, Mauriac achieves his desperately fragile and costly compromise with the world. The defiant insistence on purity of *La Robe prétexte* is here given its emotional and social form—the abdication of individuality, the loveless marriage of renunciation, the “code” and the “dignity” of the humanly impoverished Family.

Already in *Préséances* of the following year, however—which was Mauriac’s first fully post-war novel—this provisional and negative structure has been all but blown away by the reality of experience. The writer has now been driven to a much greater distance from the world he is describing: *Préséances* is a satirical study of the “wine aristocracy” of Bordeaux. While this novel is implausible, it is not because of the writing—which is often very effective in its sophisticated irony—but because Mauriac, however remotely, is still trying to come to terms with the world. Not only is he led to take his very light plot—the creation of a counter-aristocracy of intelligence—all too seriously, but he also attempts to provide the novel with the counterweight of a positive moral structure. This aspect of the work devolves largely upon the character Augustin—who is a carbon copy of a certain view of Rimbaud and whose father is a tracing of Martin du Gard’s Jean Barois. Augustin is represented as being a mysterious beacon in the lives of the dissipated, unhappy sister and her disillusioned, somewhat unattractive brother, but he is so inadequately established as to be little more than a puppet. The lost childhood, for the narrator, has now been so overlaid by an alien world that there is nothing left in immediate experience to which it can be related. Not only is Augustin unreal, but such reality as he possesses is unacceptable. Mauriac, in attempting to come to terms with the world about him, would seem to be reduced in *Préséances* to something approaching magic. The idea that Augustin could return intact from the world of childhood and mysteriously efface the stain of adult life upon brother and sister is

already a despairingly strange one; even stranger, in the end, is the fact that they can only opt for the *symbolical* Augustin. All that remains of childhood is the despairing invocation of its spirit against the reality of life. With this novel, the fragile compromise with the world has collapsed, the attempt to build bridges at the socio-moral level has failed.

Le Baiser au lépreux of 1922 marks the emergence of the "instinctive writer" proper. The confusion of plot and the moral and intellectual confusion underlying it have gone. The obvious literary influences and the reincarnations of painters and writers have gone—we have Mauriac in his own world. The embarrassment and the hesitancy have gone—we have a cruel certainty. Mauriac has given up the attempt to come to terms with the world—he has gone against the world, opted for *la politique du pire*. Over the next few years his work will display a cutting—and self-cutting—emotional violence, sanctioned and supported by the violent metaphysic. From within his Jansenist fortress—even if its protection may turn out to be illusory—he will attack the world. And, inevitably almost, the first mature novel of the instinctive writer will be the harsh picture of the failure of a Christian marriage.

In order to see this change in perspective it is necessary to develop the suggestion that the "stamp" of Catholicism upon Mauriac is in itself, perhaps, a secondary phenomenon: the metaphysical projection and justification of a deeper stamp. For the cruelty which, over the next few years, will give his work the force and the concentration of major writing would appear to be the expression of a paralysis which is largely emotional in origin. It has already been seen that the problem of sexuality was central to Mauriac's awareness of his religion and to the drive behind his writing, while the early novels have shown the various phases of the unavailing attempt to work out this problem in relation to childhood,

religion, and the provincial middle class. What has emerged is a fundamental contradiction—one which does not admit of a simple explanation. It does not seem enough to say that the horror of sexuality as sin is in conflict with the sense that it is central to human maturity—or even to say that it creates this sense. Were it merely that sexuality, in certain situations, is seen as being either sinful or morally wrong, the problem would be relatively straightforward. The dense emotional entanglement and the extraordinary vibration of Mauriac's world, however, are hardly to be explained so easily. The source of the dilemma would appear to be emotional rather than religious or moral: a conflict between the simple recognition of the necessity of sexuality and an initial, instinctive sense that it is something degrading, sub-human, and indeed—as the prevalence of such verbs as *salir* and *souiller* suggests—something dirty.

In looking back upon this problem to-day, Mauriac tends to stress the fact that in the “pre-Freudian world” of his childhood “purity was not just one of the Christian virtues, it was Virtue itself”:

Repressions and complexes, in certain cases, may produce the direst results. At best, they may produce what they call a Catholic novelist and nourish a fruitful writing career. But what the real cost to the person concerned has been, God alone can tell.¹⁴

He points out, however, that these precepts had no effect whatever on the majority of children and he has begun the passage, characteristically, by saying that his mother “considered herself as being literally entrusted with my eternal destiny.”¹⁵ It is true that, for the fatherless boy, love of the pious mother and love of God were almost inextricably blended—indeed the “irritated tenderness” he will later feel for the mother will echo the “irritated veneration” for Mother Church.¹⁶ To the extent that it is at all possible to separate the sense of emotional

security from that of spiritual identity, however, it would appear—as one might indeed expect—that the human presence of the mother was decisive and that the emotional stamp precedes the metaphysical justification. And this would seem to be confirmed by certain eloquent juxtapositions in the recent *Ce que je crois*.

In this little work, Mauriac concludes that the prime cause of his faith, on the human plane, was solitude. He again insists that he was critical of possible emotionalism in his belief and that he possessed the reality of the New Testament, but he is at once writing characteristically of Christ as "a man among men, the only one who was overflowing with that gentleness which all others had denied me."¹⁷ And he has just described in these terms his "bias towards God":

that demanding need common to all the tender of heart, which will have found no other comfort than that lavished upon them at the dawning of their lives when their mother hugged them in her arms. And no sooner were they wrenched away than they found themselves involved in that beastly business of sex [*cette chiennerie du sexe*] in which the tenderness of the child is like a little girl insulted, defiled, driven to despair.¹⁸

Mauriac's own mother exerted great emotional authority over him into his middle years, until her death, and, inevitably, she seems to linger behind the work as the real force tying the imaginative writer to his early background, as a controlling presence, dictating the form of emotional authority, colouring the idea of woman, and defining the nature of love. In the very personal *Le Mystère Frontenac*, which might be seen as a memorial hymn in her honour, the bondage of Yves to the memory of mother-love will be such as to drive him instinctively to probe the imperfection of any other love. The idea of love was initially, and understandably, associated with

the purity of mother-love—passionate love was felt to be a monstrous descent into the unknown world of instinct, a dispossession. In the instinctive writer, the sense that adult sexuality is frightening and alien would appear to precede the sense that it is sin.

To say this is to emphasise the extraordinary complexity of the interplay of emotional, metaphysical, and moral tensions in the world of Mauriac's novels. It is also to bring out the extreme ambivalence, in this connexion, of the dramatic role of sin, which would seem to involve contradiction at two levels—to lead, as it were, to two concentric vicious circles. And in order to understand the entanglement of Mauriac's world—for the vicious circles are themselves in opposition—these levels of contradiction require to be examined separately.

The outer of these circles emerges clearly enough from Mauriac's work as a whole. Initially, the reaction against sexuality appears to justify itself—beyond the demands of Catholic orthodoxy—through a totalistic Jansenist-type conception of sin which opposes nature to grace, the corrupt flesh to spirit, in a black-and-white manner. The very establishing of this stark conception, however—the acceptance of emotional alienation as spiritual alienation—tends obviously to preclude the possibility of the resistance being resolved in the world of experience. Yet the dilemma is clearly a fundamental one which—if only because love emerges as the human aspiration *par excellence* and concupiscence as the driving obsession of a sinful world—must be given a solution. Initially, Mauriac apprehends an oblique and somewhat romantic solution, which accorded with his own temperament and which is probably, as O'Brien suggests, derived from Lacordaire.¹⁹ In *La Chair et le sang*, as has been seen, and perceptible in the background of *Genitrix* and *Le Désert de l'amour*, there is the possibility that each human love, in that it may be a reflexion of the "One Love," is an intermediate term, a pathetic allegory of a higher love.

Gradually, however, as the crisis of the 1920s progresses, the opposition between passion and religion is sharpened in Mauriac's mind until, in *Dieu et Mammon*, he comes to see it as absolute—love is no longer merely a tragic deviation, it is the denial of an all-exacting God. Deep down, as the novels everywhere confirm, Mauriac was unable to alter this feeling. And the dilemma of human love, within the vicious circle, becomes insoluble.

The novels show the failure of love at the level of experience. That sexual love itself is disappointing will be almost axiomatic while, more generally, the relationship of the couple will be one of frustration, degradation and mutual torment. "Lovers" writes Mauriac in the 1930s in his *Journal*, "know each other only through the pain they inflict upon each other, through the blows they exchange."²⁰ This failure will be held to demonstrate the vanity of seeking the spiritual in the carnal, the timeless in the ephemeral. Yet the very view that love is sin and vanity would appear to dictate the failure at the level of experience. This vicious circle is broken, of course, by the intermediate answer provided by the Church: the sacrament of marriage. Marriage, however, after the earliest writings, is not presented as a spiritually high state—indeed it is often presented, in Pascalian terms, as being the reverse. It cannot assuage passion, it cannot maintain love. The one successful marriage that suggests itself—that of the Puybarauds in the margin of the action of *La Pharissienne* of 1941—depends for its pathetic and brief happiness upon the sharing of adversity and it inspires little admiration in the narrator, who at one point tells us:

I have changed little in my view of this matter. I believe that all the misfortune of men comes from their inability to remain chaste.²¹

That the commentator on the Spanish Civil War, now writing in the thick of the Second World War, should not have seen that there was something a little naïve in

this observation—to say nothing of its monumental human irrelevancy—is surprising, but indicative. At all events, the outer of the two circles remains unbroken. The final answer to the “cancer” of passion would seem to emerge as renunciation and the quest, above the conflict of human relationships, for union with God.

Such is the final contradiction of the sinner-protagonist in the face of love, the illusory freedom of action of the prodigal son. This in itself, however, is hardly enough to nourish the richness of Mauriac’s world. In a most perceptive article, P.-A. Lesort has emphasised that the thirst to possess is the inverted expression of the opposite thirst and pointed out that the destructive possessiveness affects not only the love relationship but all forms of affection in Mauriac, whether maternal, filial, or fraternal. He might seem to be generalising unduly, however, when he writes:

The novels of Mauriac offer us not a psychology of the passions, but a theology of the passions—or, more exactly, the opposite of a theology: a demonology.²²

However true this is of the later novels, it does not quite give an accurate picture of Mauriac’s richer period of the 1920s. Nor, indeed, is it likely that such a metaphysic, unsupported by close psychological analysis, could in the twentieth century produce novels with the real fictional compulsion which Mauriac’s best work possesses. For the compulsion of this work is a function of the fact that sin in these novels is immediately and urgently alive—of the fact that the “complicity” which so worried Mauriac and which was so strongly denounced by his critics was real. Which leads directly to the inner—and very different—vicious circle.

Resistance to experience does not go without a certain curiosity—or, indeed, without a certain self-protective defiance. In *La Province* Mauriac writes about the characters coming crowding around the “solitary Jansenist

child" in order to "accomplish all that his destiny deterred him from committing," and he continues:

It was then, in those days when we were a child denied and chaste, that we understood women and men. We enter all the more fully into that being whom we despair of attaining. There is nothing about the woman who will never be ours which is not known to us—no other way of possessing her than through the mind. We watch her as ardently as if we were embracing her.²³

The poignant ambivalence of the concept of sin underlying Mauriac's work of the 1920s lies in the fact that, in providing the horror of sexuality with an absolute justification, it is *thereby* conferring upon sexuality an absolute value. For the sinner-protagonist, the protective form authenticates and exacerbates the fascination, the elevation of passion into the central sin makes passion inescapable. It also, tragically, renders the reality of human passion inaccessible. The sinner-protagonist will be everywhere defeated in this confrontation. The insistence on the absolute will render unattainable the relative, the sense of emotional self-betrayal will conflict with involvement. To desire the creature *because* it is ephemeral is not to meet the reality of human relationships within the world's duration, to sin in relation to another human being is not to communicate, to absolutise sexuality as alienation and sin is to render human reciprocity impossible. Inevitably, the investing of sexuality with a total importance which the relativity of the world cannot admit turns the world of human love into a "desert of love"—the sinner-protagonist, necessarily, dictates his own defeat.

Indeed, the very emotional violence of the sinner-protagonist conceals a built-in defeatism, a sense of destiny enclosed in destiny. For—rightly or wrongly—he senses that the reality of enjoyment would reveal itself to be the reality of sin, that he could only break out of the inner

circle into the captivity of the outer circle. There are moments when, driven by the inner acceleration of his contradictions, the sinner-protagonist as prodigal son will run feverishly around in the margin between these circles as around a metaphysical race-track, defying God—and secretly appealing to God—to stop him in his frantic course. There are rarer moments when he will plod around wearily, measuring the depth of his defeat and the bitterness of his life. And the fever and the defeat will constitute the vitality of Mauriac's richest achievement in the novel.

This deadlock also emerges sharply from the poems of *Orages*—written up to 1923, the year of *Genitrix*, and published in a limited edition in 1925. The more immediate of the circles of contradiction outlined above informs the thematic structure of this little collection: passion as sin, the lack of freedom to enjoy this sin, the failure to meet the other, the appeal to God to resolve the dark destiny. The metaphysical self-excitation of these lines from "Péché mortel":

For a century would I await the second when our
bodies

Will insult the sky with their intermingled thirsts . . . ?

or of these lines from "Lumière du Corps":

Ah! so long as the other within me leaves me free
My palms will follow the purity of your legs . . .

creates its own defeat in "the accomplice of God: Disgust" of "Autre Péché." This in itself—even if we do have the impression of a limited venture on a rather gaudy metaphysical roundabout—tends to qualify O'Brien's comment that "this provisional voluptuousness, this post-dated cheque in favour of God, is too simple and disreputable not to be authentic."²⁴ Indeed, too much importance has surely been attached to these poems. "Madly, frantically," writes Nelly Corneau, "he has

rushed into every manner of love."²⁵ In fact, the only necessary basis of inspiration for this poetry, so heavily dependent upon Rimbaud and upon the Baudelairian sense of sin, is the fusion of a metaphysical obsession with a secondary, literary field of experience. This is not love poetry in any very real sense; there is no love, no couple, no sensuality as such; the excitement is metaphysical, the partner sin, the meaning defeat. Only superficially could *Orages* be taken to be more "personal" or more "penetrating" than the novels of this period. It is not here that the instinctive writer will probe the inner contradictions of a world, but rather in *Le Baiser au lépreux* and in *Genitrix*.

Le Baiser au lépreux is the simple story of the failure of a provincial, middle-class marriage arranged for material and social reasons by the two families through the intervention of a priest—who will later be shocked by the result and driven to ask himself whether he has not been too concerned with the merely immediate interests of the Church. Because his family is wealthy—"one does not say no to the son of a Péloueyre"²⁶—the pathetic Jean, timid and ugly, thus obtains the attractive Noémi. Imprisoned within this emotional lie, they nevertheless try to obey the rules of the society and display considerable good will towards each other. Sexually, however, the marriage is disastrous and the humiliation of the young man in the face of his wife's horror leads him to go off to languish alone in Paris. Summoned home because a handsome young doctor is prowling around Noémi, he returns in poor health to find that, although her piety will keep her faithful, she has thrived by his absence. He makes himself as small as possible in this situation, contrives to contract tuberculosis from a sick friend, and dies. Noémi, since the marriage contract contains a provision against remarriage, will be condemned to remain a widow for life. The renunciation of husband and wife could hardly be seen as a victory for God in this novel, since the whole emphasis of the work is on the human price

involved. What is brought out with great force—and sanctioned by the doubts of the priest—is the sacrifice of love and of youth in this society by the alliance of the Family and an organised Church coloured by its values. And in the end the boy's inhumanly selfish father—who refuses the troubled priest's request that the provision against remarriage be rescinded and who will thus be looked after by Noémi for the remainder of his days—emerges as the triumphant incarnation of an acquisitive society.

With this bare, uncompromising little work, which is already using the richness of nature as an ironical counterpoint to human failure, the novelist has arrived with a vengeance. As yet, however, he appears to be too angrily involved to sustain the necessary artistic distance in relation to his subject. He details with a patient cruelty the physical imperfections of the young man, the horrors and the ironies of the bridal chamber in the boarding-house at Arcachon, and the agony of physical proximity thereafter—all of which may be accepted as necessary to the establishment of the objective situation. On the surface of the writing, however, there is at times a kind of lacerating, world-hating excitement—the insistence on the grotesqueness of Jean's ugliness, for example, or the description of man and wife in bed as the grub beside the corpse—which weakens the objective situation by making it appear to hinge upon near-abnormality. Indeed, we have the impression of a second angry story latent in and interfering with the organic integrity of the first. The instinctive writer has not yet accepted the price of self-expression in the novel: the necessary autonomy of the projected world.

The next novel, *Le Fleuve de feu* (1923), which would appear from the *Journal* to be the re-working of an earlier piece, does not call for lengthy treatment. The novel is divided into two parts, which are poorly related, and given a formally edifying ending which is inadequately

prepared. The psychological continuity of the main character is rather deficient, and the situation, once again, is weakened by the surface excitement of the writing, suggestive of a fear-hatred of the world—it is not easy, for example, to accept a summary, *ex cathedra* presentation of post-war Paris as a "jungle," with its "human sewer" of the Métro and its "living sewer of the Boulevards."²⁷ Romantic melodrama though it is, however, *Le Fleuve de feu* is interesting for several reasons. In the youthful Daniel Trasis, it displays the sinner-protagonist as prodigal son in all his pristine innocence—and destructiveness. For the vulnerable young debauchee, "stupefied" at the absence of revelation of the *première communion*, translates his thirst for purity into the annihilation of purity—while at the same time feeling enraged at those women who have already been "used": "who have the traces of fingers upon them."²⁸ The discovery that his present "prey" belongs to this category will lead him to tears and, since he fears from women "the worst form of betrayal: that which consists in being another person," there will be no real escape from the impasse.²⁹ The characteristic hothouse atmosphere is already present, and the mixture of sensuality and religiosity was not rendered less shocking for the original audience by Mauriac's somewhat provocative Preface.

In *Genitrix*, Mauriac's first outstanding novel and the one which brought him fame, the faults of the preceding novels have not entirely disappeared. There is still a tendency to depart from the viewpoint of the character and the time of the immediate situation—"Fernand did not know that . . .", "she did not understand that . . .", and even, at one point, "God did not see that. . ."³⁰ All this, however, is absorbed into the almost mythical intensity of the story. Writing at an equal distance from his characters, Mauriac now has his subject firmly in focus. The surface cruelty has given way to a deeper, integrated cruelty of intuition. Rarely in literature has

the mother who destroys her "loved one"—the term is relentlessly repeated—been scrutinised with such intensity or projected with such perception.

The story of *Genitrix* has something of the luminous simplicity of nightmare. The massive, frighteningly ugly, ironically named Félicité Cazenave, has possessed her son Fernand to the point that, at fifty, he is reduced mentally and physically to a near-invalid, fossilised within a state of childish dependence. Frustration at the realisation of his situation has begun to lead the worm to turn in a futile fashion—his "dearest pleasure" is to hurt his mother.³¹ It is all too late for self-assertion, however. His mother can accept as his "little habit" his occasional departure to Bordeaux to spend a day or two with a prostitute in the sure knowledge that, after this defiant and miserable little venture, he will be only too happy to get back to the old maid's comforts with which she ties him to the home. In such a mood of self-assertion he has married Mathilde, a pathetic young woman in search of security. Mathilde, however, can only be a pawn in the claustrophobic battle of love and hate between mother and son and cannot at any level compete with Félicité. Within two months of the marriage, Fernand has gone back to his old room beside his mother's and will abet her persecution of Mathilde. As the novel opens, Mathilde, dying alone and neglected of a miscarriage, sees the gigantic, intermingled shadows of mother and son projected menacingly against the wall above her. And so she dies, unloved and almost unnoticed, her body, within the terms of the Mauriac fusion of sexuality and metaphysics, never having been "prepared for eternal dissolution" by the "annihilation of the caress."³²

The cord which binds Fernand to his mother—if it can never be severed—is now weakened. One of those "who are only capable of loving against someone," he has failed to love the living Mathilde against the fountain of love-hate: Félicité.³³ Now, however, he can love her dead

against his mother. In a morbid state of mourning, he excises his mother from the wedding-picture—for which, characteristically, he had dropped his bride's arm at the last moment and taken that of Félicité—and makes the image of Mathilde the centrepiece of a primitive little shrine which he sets up in her bedroom. Félicité, ignored, dies of a stroke. Fernand is free. For the man of fifty who has really been married only to his mother, however, who has never known emotional or moral maturity, freedom is terrifying. He has, in a sense, killed the Sphinx—but there can be no victory. Fernand, in destroying the destroyer, has destroyed his whole emotional horizon and formalised the failure of his life. Alone, he can only be haunted by his ghosts. In the end, frightened at night, he runs like a child to the room of the pious old servant Marie, seeking protection against loneliness and against the reality of the world.

While the dreamlike intensity of *Genitrix* is not easy to analyse, it is clear that Mauriac's art in this novel is considerable. By commencing with the feverish imaginings of the dying Mathilde—before giving us the background in a flashback and then proceeding to resolve the situation—he at once obtains a nightmarish present in which both past and future are felt inevitably to be inscribed. Again, his intuition has led him unerringly to the simple, powerful images by which the nightmare may be maintained and made concrete: the house which trembles to the sound of trains thundering past towards other worlds (Mauriac's original still overlooks the station at Langon), the dramatically used photograph, the pathetic and pagan shrine, and—above all—the platform by the window of every bedroom in the house which Félicité has had erected so as to observe the comings and goings of her son in whatever direction. Finally, there is the subtle manner in which the story is related to its natural and human setting, an effective ambivalence in the presentation of the natural world which matches the con-

trolled irony of much of the writing. On the one hand, there is a natural sympathy in this land of the Sun-God between human passion and the "fire in the sky."³⁴ On the other hand, the beauty of this world contrasts ironically with the ugliness of its inhabitants. In trying to possess rather than participate in this world, in putting a price on the pines, on people, on marriage, on the birth of a child, these empires of Family are betraying the world as well as betraying themselves. And the monstrously possessive Félicité loses none of her hallucinatory individuality for being the grotesque embodiment of a rage to own that is expressive of the human failure of a class.

If another writer might by this stage be ready to abandon his background, Mauriac is still held by the emotional tie. And yet the distance covered since the early writings is considerable. With this novel, the *moral* rejection of the restricted world of a provincial middle-class society would appear to be complete—here and in *Le Baiser au lépreux* the essential attack has been made. Again, the latent pantheism is now so developed that at moments God seems to be only a shadow across a pagan sky, while the positive human Christian element has been relegated to the margin of the conflict in the figure of the old servant Marie. Above all, however—as the title itself suggests—the instinctive writer has disengaged a fundamental principle. He has apprehended a strange identity between hatred and love.³⁵ With his *genetrix*—the source of love and the scourge of love—he has pinpointed with dreamlike precision a basic contradiction. He may not as yet have created a hero possessed of a normal degree of emotional and moral maturity, but in this novel he has penetrated imaginatively into the very heart of the emotional paralysis of a matrocentric world.

It is already late in the day, however, and the Mauriac of the *Journal* is much concerned with age and with loneliness. "Loneliness at last accepted," we find him writing

around the period of the writing of *Genitrix*, "loneliness which I shall no longer seek to evade, loneliness which has vanquished me."³⁶ And yet the very achievement of this novel is a kind of commitment which leads morally beyond the *politique du pire*, the very totality of defeat represented in *Genitrix* a kind of victory—a hard plateau for the higher achievement and the real testing-time to come in the next few years.

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CHAPTER IV

THE INDIRECT APOLOGY

In 1923, Mauriac told Lefèvre:

In my next novels, Catholicism will affect my heroes less and less. And yet it will itself be a Catholic enterprise to show the absence of Catholicism and the lamentable consequences which it involves.¹

Six years later, in the Preface to *Trois Récits* (1929), he observes that the attacks of his Catholic critics had led him over this period to stop writing as an overtly Catholic novelist and to aim rather at a straightforward rendering of the world—in the hope that this would in itself constitute an “indirect apology for Christianity.”²

In fact, however, the *ad hoc* formulation of the indirect apology is little more than a rationalisation of the rebellious turn which Mauriac’s writing was taking at this time. Philosophically, it is not convincing—to show the absence of Catholicism is hardly to demonstrate the truth of Catholicism, while to demonstrate the “misery of man without God” is not, in strict logic, to argue the reality of God. In any event, the negative demonstration—not unfairly described in *La Revue apologétique* as an “upside-down apology”³—does not conform to the full impact of the writings themselves. The simple truth is that the instinctive writer needed the neutral flag over these critical years. Nor should too much be read into his Prefaces—at once sibylline, self-protective, and provocative—or even into his dedications at this time. The dedication of *Genitrix* to his doctor brother, for example: “To my brother . . . I entrust these sick ones . . .”, led

some to interpret this first novel in which Mauriac achieves universality as a species of case-history, while the interpretation of *Thérèse Desqueyroux* (1927) was bedevilled by an almost medieval discussion as to whether or not Thérèse was a "monster." In a recent interview Mauriac put this down to simple prudence: "it was a necessary precaution at the time. In fact, I am entirely on the side of this woman."⁴ The indirect apology freed him to a large extent from inhibition and rhetoric, and led him to project the contradictions of a world in a controlled and concrete manner.

A kind of throbbing spiritual silence overhangs the work of this period. In "Un Homme de lettres," a story which in its detached irony is reminiscent of the tone of Somerset Maugham, we find Mauriac writing:

It is strange that no mythology has ever represented God in the form of a cocked ear; that which gives no answer but which is perhaps listening.⁵

The sinner-hero, now that the leash has slackened mysteriously, perhaps perfidiously, is faced with the problem of reconciling the absolute aspiration with the relativity of experience. The immediate problem, now that the emotional failure of marriage and family is virtually taken for granted, is that of love. The choice—for Dr Courrèges of *Le Désert de l'amour*, as for the hero of "Un Homme de lettres," and the hero of its excellent companion-piece "Coups de couteau," who lies in bed during a long night telling his wife of the suffering caused him by his love for a young woman—is a grievous dilemma, in that emotional resistance and a kind of negative intimation of the spiritual are the determining elements, rather than simply moral factors. The protagonist may either live through emotional, perhaps even spiritual death within the imprisoning family and attempt to build a life upon the known reality of renunciation and suffering, or he may attempt to break away from the

prison, which is also a refuge, and seek to achieve love—which may itself be illusion and emotional self-betrayal and which may also, perhaps, be fraught with spiritual danger of momentous import. The conflicting pressures are thus considerable and the balance delicate—the man of letters of the story feels that the occasional escapade places him on a rapidly descending slope and concludes that “one has to remain halfway up this slope, diminished and impoverished.”⁶

In 1928 this balance is all but disrupted by the most openly rebellious of these works, *Destins*, which presents the total breakdown of the scrupulous middle-aged woman confronted with passion and which gives a most caustic portrait of her pious, interfering son. Powerful novel though it is, however, *Destins* is marred by a rather contrived ending involving a car accident and a death-bed repentance. Accordingly, this chapter will be concentrated on *Le Désert de l'amour* and *Thérèse Desqueyroux*—the two essential moments, the negative and the positive, of this critical period and also, probably, Mauriac's two best novels.

Sitting in a bar in Paris, Raymond Courrèges notices the woman who set him off on his dissolute path seventeen years earlier in Bordeaux. His memory carries him back to the days when he used to find himself on the same tram as this Maria Cross. For the hungry adolescent—who could not suspect that the notorious kept woman of Victor Larousselle was in reality an indolent, romantic, and not at all a sensuous woman—she could only be a mythical object of sexual attraction. Unknown to Raymond, she was also an object of romantic attraction for his father. This distinguished doctor feels trapped within the prison of a family whose members are “as mingled and yet as remote as the stars which make up the Milky Way.”⁷ If he is still close to his mother, he has been alienated by the vulgarity of his wife. He is too shy to make contact with his son, and he feels that he has lost

his daughter through her marriage to the young Lieutenant Chasles—the rather brash confidence of this young man (who in fact shares many of his own views) and what is presented as the vulgar sexual happiness of the young couple do not recommend themselves to this sensitive, unconsciously self-absorbed man. Maria Cross is thus the magnet, not only for the predatory adolescent attempting to achieve manhood, but for the suffering father attempting to retrieve his—strangers within the family, they pursue, in this cruelly conceived situation, the same “butterfly” outside.

Maria Cross, however, can help neither. For the father—who never screws up the courage to declare his feelings—her attitude is one of respect, sometimes mingled with mild irritation. For Raymond—who reminds her unconsciously of her dead son François—her feeling is largely a romantic idealisation of the maternal. Sexuality in fact disgusts this woman who, the doctor feels, is possibly a Lesbian. When Raymond cuts through this ominous and negative entanglement by making crude advances to Maria, she at once repels and laughs off his approach, calling him a “dirty little beast” in the process.⁸ Raymond is so deeply humiliated that he will seek only revenge from women henceforward. Now that her illusion has collapsed, Maria makes an unsuccessful attempt at suicide, and Dr Courrèges finds her, in her delirium, saying that there is within us “not loves, but one love,” that in sexuality “we take the only possible way, but it is a way which does not lead to what we are seeking.”⁹ The doctor falls ill, Raymond embarks upon his vengeful course—and at this point the novel switches back to the idle young man of thirty-five sitting in the bar in Paris.

Called over by Victor Larousselle—who wants to be free to flirt with two girls at the bar—Raymond discovers that Maria is now married to Victor, his wife having since died. She recalls only vaguely the incident which

marked Raymond's life and she is not anxious to re-open the past—under the influence of her stepson, whom she much admires, she has become pious. At this point, Larousselle collapses with a stroke and has to be taken home—Raymond calling his father, who happens to be in Paris for a conference, to attend him. The doctor, whom Raymond has not seen for three years, finds that Victor's condition is not serious, but his own wound has been re-awakened by the meeting with Maria, and he lingers pathetically, but unavailingly, over his departure. The bitterly sad ending to the novel shows us Raymond seeing off at the station this suffering, diminished old man who now talks as fussily as his wife. The failure to achieve love has poisoned his life—"all my debauchery was in my mind," he says of his lifelong betrayal of his wife through desire, "is that any better than actually living it?"¹⁰ And yet, with grim irony, Mauriac makes him advise Raymond to get married. He recommends the thousand cares of marriage as a "shelter," as a way of taking the mind off the "profound inner wound."¹¹ Raymond discovers that his own obsession, far from being dissipated by the re-union with Maria, has been strengthened, that he has in a sense taken over the earlier suffering of his father—that father and son, however remote from each other within the family, are nevertheless "related through Maria Cross."¹²

Le Désert de l'amour, which is longer than its predecessors, and which presents three characters almost equal in importance, is a richly complex novel. The thematic orchestration is skilful, the writing quietly suggestive and controlled. Moving outwards from *Genitrix*, Mauriac attains a new kind of negative balance with the world—not entirely unlike the tenuous compromise earlier achieved in *La Chair et le sang*. The existing elements of his world are transmuted within this new organic development. In *Maria Cross*, the fundamental emotional contradiction of the *genetrix* is at once generalised and

contained: diffused into the relativity of the world, yet powerfully intensified through the eloquently symbolical name. The emergence of a Dr Courrèges, as the extension into maturity of the type of the shy one who cannot commit himself in experience—he was originally meant to be a secondary character but his humanity came in the end to be the moral centre of the novel—was perhaps inevitable after *Genitrix*. Raymond belongs to the other type of the pursuer, but his line of destiny intersects and eventually coincides with that of the doctor. In father and son, therefore, we have the two male types of the novels—or the two phases of the same basic type—converging in the face of an essential image of Woman.

If he is attempting to supersede *Genitrix* and to move outwards toward the larger world, Mauriac is in fact led in this novel—as the ambitious title suggests and as the framing of the provincial story within the Paris of the 1920s implies—to involve the whole of humanity in the emotional contradiction and in the failure of love. That we have the doubly cruel irony of a father and his son pursuing the same, sexually frigid woman may suggest that he has not been able to diversify the contradiction to any great extent—and certainly, were the “indirect apology” to be seen merely as a philosophical demonstration arguing the failure of human love on the basis of this extraordinarily narrow and self-defeating situation, it might be dismissed at once. Essentially, however, *Le Désert de l’amour* is a powerful story of emotional deadlock which is valid artistically not as philosophical affirmation but as a sombre interrogation of the world—it has something of the resemblance to reality and the dark suggestiveness of the photographic negative.

The failure of the institutions of Family and marriage at the human level is now assumed. Of course, in this society, as Mauriac represents it, marriage is almost bound to fail—and to this extent the doctor’s wife is a victim of her situation. Three generations live under the

same roof—the grandmother resenting the mother who resents the married daughter. Marriage is less a relationship between individuals than a moment of the eternal cycle of the predatory and self-devouring family—love is merely epiphenomenal to the propagation of the species. The corruption and the frustration of the “youthful ones” in this situation is so inevitable that the irony and a certain muffled violence in Mauriac’s narrative idiom come to seem quite natural—Raymond leans over his reclining father “as though to kiss or to plunge a knife into him,” while the father, not recognising the opportunity of making contact with his son, will not know that “the young prey” is offered and vulnerable beside him.¹³ The suffering, the frustration, the latent violence, and the driving need for love are very real.

Unerringly, however, Mauriac adumbrates a world in which these demands are unattainable. Indeed, in a modern world which Dr Courrèges sees as “the most ignoble era of mankind” the self-devouring Family becomes a necessary refuge.¹⁴ Sexuality is morally precluded in that it is defined in terms of this world—the ephemeral butterflies dancing on the “shagreen skin” of the tiny dance-floor in the Paris bar—as well as being identified with the vulgar enjoyment of the young couple within the home. The structure of the novel cleverly brings to bear upon the central love situation all the irony, the wear and tear, the bitter irreversibility of time. Again, the overall atmosphere of destiny makes moral maturity and moral choices virtually meaningless—Maria’s suggestion that people really begin to live after the age of twenty-five or thirty is opposed by the now familiar view that everything is predetermined by childhood and adolescence.¹⁵ The doors are closed, the necessity of the failure of love made universal.

If there is no freedom in which the moral choice can be formulated, neither can the emotional choice—in a closely-knit entanglement which is the quintessence of

paralysis—be crystallised. The doctor is too boyishly timid to declare his love. The Lesbian cannot offer sexual love to father or son. The adolescent cannot supersede childhood and achieve adult love with a woman who reveals herself as the mother, idealising her maternity. In this darkly embryonic world all is protected and contained—life is suspended, resolution is impossible. In discussing the novel, Turnell has suggested that “in this Jansenist world sex is destiny.”¹⁶ If so, it is not so much because it is essential but destructive as because it is essential but morally and emotionally inaccessible. And the very image of this ambivalence is the stained Madonna: Maria Cross. It was already clear that in the writings of Mauriac woman is the cross—here it is symbolically formalised. It is established in relation to a woman who bears the eloquent name of Maria, suggestive of sanctity and the higher motherhood that escapes sexuality. Kept woman, grieving mother, faintly disreputable romantic, nobly aspiring person with a sense of the noumenal, sexual image for the male, Lesbian, *luxe et misère* like her apartment, all things to all men and ultimately unattainable—the ambivalence of this powerful creation who incarnates afresh the fatality of the fundamental contradiction is almost beyond analysis. And her pervasive ambiguity is such that we are led to accept aspects of the situation which we might otherwise resist. Would it not be surprising in the wider world, for example, to find a young man pleasing to women who is unable, after seventeen years of punishing substitutes for Maria Cross, to supersede an original humiliation which is not uncommon and to achieve some degree of moral maturity and humanity in his relationships? Is it that he has, in this humiliation, glimpsed a barrier which is fundamental?

The obvious reference in this connexion is the *Maria Cross* of O'Brien, who studies the dependence upon childhood and the dominance of the mother as factors

common to the imaginative patterns of a number of Catholic writers. His explanation of this particular point should be qualified to the extent that Dr Courrèges *also* sees Maria Cross as the young woman whose body has not been spoilt by repeated pregnancies or by the "dirty habits" of sexual relations within marriage;¹⁷ his main contention, however, is convincing:

The mother characteristics are transferred to Maria Cross, not as seen, initially, by Raymond, but as seen by his father. The dramatic crux occurs when Raymond approaches her as a lover and she, in repelling him, reveals herself in the character of the woman his father loves; in effect she turns into his mother. This is the moment which, as we are told, will poison his whole life and all his future relations with women. Here the proposition "woman is the cross" can be expanded into: "'The woman' turns into 'the mother' and *that* is the cross." To this cross Auguste Duprouy [of "Le Rang", in *Plongées*], Jean de Mirbel [of *La Pharissienne*], Fernand Cazenave and many another Mauriac hero are nailed.¹⁸

This interpretation, which has the merit of respecting the artistic integrity of the novel, explains Raymond's sense of a vocation to Maria Cross at the end of the book—his painful awareness of "the closest communion" with "a woman whom he is nevertheless certain that he will never attain."¹⁹

O'Brien's pages are probably the most penetrating that have been written on Mauriac. Nevertheless, he might seem to be writing loosely when he speaks, more generally, about "the incestuous drive which dominates Mauriac's work."²⁰ Indeed—and although this problem will arise in a different and slightly more complex form in the consideration of Mauriac's theatre—he might seem to be putting the matter upside down. What we appear to have encountered in earlier novels, and what would seem to

emerge in the equivocal mistress-mother-saint syndrome of *Le Désert de l'amour*, is the inhibition and, now, the bitter frustration, through the interposition of the maternal, of an outward drive. It is true that the novel suggests the justification of the emotional blockage through the universalising and the spiritualising of defeat, but this is in fact only a negative stage on the way to superseding the deadlock and, meanwhile, the spiritualisation is balanced by the bitterness—indeed it is essentially from the intensity of the stalemate between them that the compulsion of the work springs.

While the suffering “youthful ones,” the three main characters, are in an important sense very alike, it is Maria Cross who incarnates the emotional blockage in its entirety. “Always between those whom I wanted to possess and myself,” she says, “there stretched that fetid land, that swamp, that mire.”²¹ The despairing choice in Mauriac’s desert of love is either to die of thirst or to plunge into the fetid swamp of sexuality. For there is no “living spring,” no “pure water” in this desert. Maria dreams of “a being whom we could attain and possess, but not in the flesh—by whom we would be possessed”.²² resolution must come from above. And yet, if it comes in some degree to Maria through the influence of her pious stepson, it comes neither to Raymond nor to the doctor—God is invoked at the end of the book, but in the conditional and outside the awareness of father and son.²³ The bitter sadness which makes the book more of an “upside down apology” than an “indirect apology” reflects the fact that the stalemate is not only between the “desert” and the “swamp” but between the world and God.

Even in a negative form, however, the apologetic implies the demonstrative whereas the interpretation of the novel, if it is dictated essentially by this double stalemate, must respect the specific persuasion of Mauriac’s writing.

At the level of the situation itself, the novel relates itself to Christianity through a kind of negative coinci-

dence. While the emotional deadlock, in the case of the doctor, is a three-cornered one in that it involves the tie to the family, for Maria as well as for Raymond—whose attempt over seventeen years to break the deadlock through violence and negation in his relationships is shown to be illusory—it is the effect of a direct contradiction. This is stated by Maria herself as follows:

Just think that there is no other road between us and human beings than touching, embracing—voluptuousness, in fact! And yet we well know where this path leads and why it was made: to continue the species, as you say, doctor, and for that reason alone.²⁴

For that reason alone. . . . The emotional contradiction is here protected by a rather fundamentalist interpretation of the Catholic view of sexuality; and the coincidence is most ambivalently achieved and incarnated through the undeclared Lesbian, the emotionally incomplete—and thereby, as it would seem, potentially saintly—mother-figure of Maria Cross. Not only is the emotional deadlock universalised through a negative rendering of the world as the restricted provincial family and the night-life of Paris, but it would seem to be justified spiritually in a manner which is not only negative, but damagingly ambiguous.

The tone of the novel, however, goes beyond this position to some extent. Mauriac's fiction at its best is suggestive, poetic, and symbolical, and to that extent interrogative—in particular, the rich reverberations of the ambivalent Maria Cross are such as to transcend the immediate situation. Again, the bitterness of the novel constitutes a comment on the situation. The autonomy of the world which Mauriac creates through his excellent artistic containment of the vibrant emotional deadlock makes the crucifixion of father and son very real. And however dark the lens through which it is viewed, the problem around which the novel revolves—that of re-

conciling love as passion and as metaphysical aspiration with the institutions of marriage and family—is a real one. *Le Désert de l'amour* achieves a suggestive confrontation with the world. Through its double stalemate, however, it perhaps achieves more than this. If Mauriac was constantly criticised for his insistence upon the sexual, he felt profoundly that to dramatise the problem of sexuality was to dramatise the whole Christian view of the world.²⁵ In so far as the acceptance of sexuality may well stand symbolically for the acceptance of the world, the intuition of the instinctive writer was perhaps a true one. And the grievous image of human love presented in this novel might seem ultimately to constitute a dark interrogation not only of the world, but of Christianity itself.

With *Thérèse Desqueyroux* (1927), which shows a further and significant shift in the internal balance of Mauriac's world, the dark interrogation becomes a vibrant poetic challenge. In this story of a woman who is led by her sense of imprisonment within the Family to attempt to murder her husband—the immediate success of the novel contained a strong element of the *succès de scandale*, some critics even pursuing a parallel with Gide's *acte gratuit*—the rebellious strain developing slowly through Mauriac's writing reaches its artistic culmination.

Underlying the work up to this time—as Crémieux noted in 1927²⁶—there is a broad theme of the escape from solitude towards self-fulfilment. After the failure of the earliest novels to establish a positive, intermediate solution to this drive, Mauriac is led to adopt his *politique du pire*. The very harshness of this approach, however, tends to blur the basic theme to some extent. In *Le Baiser au lépreux*, for example, the illness and the excessive ugliness of the young hero detract from the generality of the theme. In *Genitrix*, Fernand's situation is presented—as though by a nightmarish prefiguration of defeat—as being so irretrievable that the only mode of self-assertion left to him is the ironically “posthumous”

victory over *Félicité*. In *Le Désert de l'amour*, if the harshness has to some extent been softened by the confrontation with the world, the negative balance of the situation prevents the conflict between the doctor's need for self-fulfilment and his sense of being buried alive within the family from emerging as a real choice. With *Thérèse Desqueyroux*, the three-cornered situation is now superseded and—for the first time in his mature writing—Mauriac expresses the whole direction of the novel through a central character with whom he is entirely in sympathy. He is not yet ready, as it were, to present Dr Courrèges with a clear conflict and a real choice. The distance covered, however, is considerable in that this writer who has sometimes been seen as a misogynist is now identifying himself with the revolt of a sister-figure to Maria Cross.

The story of *Thérèse Desqueyroux* sprang initially from Mauriac's own recollection of a spectacular poisoning case which came up before the Bordeaux Assizes at the end of May 1906. Despite an overwhelming circumstantial case, Mme Canaby was acquitted of having attempted to murder her husband. The acquittal, together with the fact that a great deal of evidence appeared to have been withheld by the family and by the doctors, prompted *Le Figaro* to observe acidly that husbands were not fetching a high price that year in Bordeaux.²⁷ The figure of Mme Canaby was later overlaid in Mauriac's mind by the memory of another young woman who detested her husband, and this composite image slumbered for many years until it forced itself upon the instinctive writer, at this demanding moment, as an image of his own situation. So it is that *Thérèse*—another Lesbian—belongs not to the world of Mme Canaby (whose physical appearance she inherits) but to the inner world of contradiction of the writer himself: the world of Maria Cross. The "drama" of the instinctive writer—himself concerned lest his troubled writings made

him a poisoner of the spirit—is stripped to its essentials, conveyed through a single viewpoint, and embodied in a single character who, if a near-murderess, is nevertheless the most attractive human being in the book and, for Mauriac to-day, a “noble creature.” As he observes in conversation, having said that he had himself been in “that same cage of the family, of a little *milieu* in which the letter *killed* the spirit”:

Thérèse Desqueyroux was indeed the novel of revolt. The story of *Thérèse* was the whole of my own drama, a protest, a cry. . . . And I could well say, even though I have never contemplated poisoning anyone, that *Thérèse Desqueyroux* was myself.

Thérèse Desqueyroux is a superbly constructed and beautifully written novel. The simplicity of the story and the economy of the writing are such, indeed, as almost to conceal the refinement and the complexity of Mauriac's art at this moment of his career. The vibrant sense of an inscrutable destiny, everywhere subtly suggested, is incorporated structurally through the use of the flashback which covers the greater part of the novel. We meet *Thérèse* emerging from the Palais de Justice after the hushing-up of the crime, to accompany her on her lonely journey through the night towards the remote house at Argelouse and towards her real judgment at the hands of the husband whose false testimony has saved her; the journey forward into a menacing future is balanced by the journey of self-discovery into the past in such a way as to create a climate of static intensity. The adoption of the single point of view establishes a unified level of awareness which combines with Mauriac's excellent dramatic preparation to make the psychological progression towards the crime—which *Thérèse* herself is trying in retrospect to understand—totally convincing.

Even as a child, measuring her dependence upon Anne de la Trave, *Thérèse* feels the burden of individuality in

the restricted, static, and hierarchised society of the Landes. It is largely to escape this feeling that she accepts the obvious marriage to Bernard. She finds, however, that in inscribing herself within the given order she has "walked like a sleep-walker into a cage."²⁸ Her frigidity within marriage now contrasts bitterly with the ecstasy of Anne's love for the young man from Paris, Jean Azévédo, and her motherhood becomes the very form of her alienation and her subjection to the Family. She begins to poison Bernard accidentally—or, more exactly, through the poetic causality of the forest fire at Mano—simply by failing to tell him that, in his confusion, he may inadvertently have doubled the dose of Fowler's solution (containing arsenic) which he has been taking for his health. Gradually, however, without realising the full significance of her actions, she is led into a dark tunnel in which she instinctively follows, as a fatality, the apparent logic of events. In blindly seeking to kill, she is not so much attacking Bernard in himself as attempting, symbolically, to annihilate the humanly dead society in which she feels that she is "choking." Upon her eventual return to Argelouse there will be no reconciliation; she will in effect be sequestered until her failing health frightens the Family into allowing her to escape to Paris.

Thérèse Desqueyroux has something of the concentration, the unity and the imaginative force of a dramatic poem. In this self-confrontation projected against the essential poetic landscape—the metaphorical and symbolical possibilities of the Landes everywhere supply the texture of the writing—Mauriac is fighting the battle of *Thérèse* at the higher level of suggestion. Immanent in the drugged air before the decisive moment of the forest fire, seeking expression in the moaning of the pines at night, there is a fatality as ambivalent as it is universal. The poetic suggestion at once creates the sense of a mysteriously darkened world and authenticates *Thérèse's* response to the beauty of this world, her thirst for love. In *Thérèse*

Desqueyroux, a world is in the balance. Mauriac's Preface, with its indirect reference to the possibility of sainthood for Thérèse, may prompt the reader to see his "novel of revolt" as an "indirect apology"—and it is true that there is in his situation a kind of negative control which tacitly leaves open the possibility that Thérèse's tragedy may be the mask of a higher destiny. That Mauriac should offer his heroine a remote sanctity somehow *authenticated* by her oppression by the Family, however, would seem to be a transcendent paradox largely external to the central direction of the novel and to Thérèse's own awareness. The instinctive writer might seem to have gone beyond the formal aesthetic in that he frees his freethinking poisoner without leading her either towards the finality of moral guilt or to the realisation of sin.

The situation in which Mauriac places his heroine brings out sharply her superiority to those around her—the noblest member of the Family is the poisoner. And the novel is so constructed that the reader is led to identify himself with Thérèse until hers becomes the essential viewpoint and hers, indeed, the only real awareness of the world. In these circumstances, and with the governing hand of destiny taking over from her the immediate responsibility for her act, the poisoning assumes a poetic, almost a moral necessity. In her long meditation during the journey back to Argelouse, Thérèse is trying to understand. And yet, prepared as she is to assume moral guilt, she does not find guilt—in seeking the source of her act she finds the fire at Mano, the poetic fatality governing the world. In interrogating this fatality she apprehends, not sin but rather a suspension of judgment, a mystery which seems to contain a secret justification, a strange guarantee of ultimate blamelessness. If Thérèse engages the reader's sympathy so completely, it is because he senses that this tale of a poisoner is less a story of sin, or even guilt, than the story—in the very shadow

of an inscrutable destiny—of a pathetic kind of human innocence. And to the extent that *Thérèse Desqueyroux* is at all a Christian novel—"it is not a Christian novel," says Mauriac in conversation, "but only a Christian could have written it"—the symbolical value of this innocence, established as it is in relation to a rebellious drive towards moral freedom and the fulfilment of the senses, is obviously considerable. If this resonant and delicately contained story is indeed a "novel of revolt," it is because the instinctive writer is obscurely challenging the fundamental Christian idea of guilt—posing the problem of a world without God in such a manner as to pose the problem of God himself.

Thérèse Desqueyroux will "haunt" Mauriac into the 1930s, recurring in two short stories and in *La Fin de la nuit* until she becomes the central figure of his fiction. Certainly, the escape of Thérèse is a highly significant moment in his career—not only because it projects the maturing crisis of this period but also because it faintly foreshadows the inevitable resolution of the crisis. For if Mauriac frees his Thérèse from a world whose values are false, he apprehends no truer values in the world beyond. Jean Azévédo, the young man from Paris, stands for the wider world in this novel and it is he who, in several key passages, makes explicit Mauriac's own view of the situation—yet his disease suggests symbolically that his individualism is a mirage. And Paris itself, at the end of the book, is diminished by slanting allusions to the city as a place of meaningless fever and promiscuity. Mauriac, totally behind his heroine's driving need for freedom, cannot visualise the form or the reality of that freedom—the breaking of the inner circle seems, once again, to lead to the finality of the outer circle.

For Mauriac as a novelist, the moment of the breaking of this inner circle is a decisive one. With the resolution of the immediate emotional deadlock—the heroine of *Destins* of the following year is a normally constituted

woman—the spell hanging over the three vibrant novels from *Genitrix* to *Thérèse Desqueyroux* is broken. The poetic and dreamlike projection, above the moral, of the conflict with the world has exhausted its own terms. And the first sign of hesitancy on the part of the instinctive writer is perhaps to be seen in the contrived ending of *Destins*. Mauriac here carries revolt, as it were, to the limit of the outer circle, but the underlying contradiction which had dictated the inevitability of form of the greater novels has emerged unmistakably to the surface—the poetic confrontation has led beyond itself to the moral problem, the artistic certainty has given way to doubt and hesitation. The world, in a sense, has won over the fiction.

The year of *Destins* was the year in which Mauriac himself came to his “moment of choice.” The mounting crisis had now crystallised into an extramarital involvement which might have threatened his family situation. And yet, as he says to-day, if it was primarily an emotional crisis, it was one which affected every aspect of his situation. There was what he terms “the difficulty of being a Catholic”—the strain of living up to his belief, the rankling feeling that he had never been able to opt freely for this faith, the dislike of the “Pharisees,” the irritation that his religion should be so widely identified with a certain set of social values. There were the strains of his position as a well-known Catholic writer—the permanent uneasiness about his work, the resentment that, as he writes in *Dieu et Mammon*, the eminent churchmen in whom he sought to confide appeared to see “no essential difference between me and, say, the author of the *Folies-Bergère* revue.”²⁹ There was still the pull of Bordeaux, the sense that with his harsh picture of his background he had betrayed his origins, the grievous knowledge that his “scandalous” novels had brought suffering to his mother. He describes how he would return to Malagar in the evening and find her sitting “in that chair over there”: “She would say nothing, but I

knew that she read my novels, that she took everything I wrote quite literally, that she thought that [like my characters] I too had. . . . It was appalling!" There was the feeling, which recurs insistently in his writing dealing with the crisis, that he was no longer young, the sharp sense that—in "these days of interminable suffering when I might at any moment have been plunged into [eternal] death"³⁰—he was gambling with his salvation. In *Ce que je crois* he describes himself as having been "almost mad" over this period.³¹ In fact, at the moment of *Souffrances du chrétien*, as he says very simply today, he "could stand it no longer."

Mauriac found a priest.

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CHAPTER V

THE LATER NOVELIST

Le Nœud de vipères of 1932, Mauriac's first major novel after the resolution of the crisis, is free from the lyricism, the "connivance," and the atmosphere of the "Turkish bath" which Du Bos had discerned in the earlier writings.¹ This new tone, of course, is in the nature of the novel, since it is essentially a retrospective—the new Mauriac is making a controlled attempt at the imaginative and moral re-ordering of the existing world of the "instinctive writer." If the novel is free from sensuous descriptions and if it shows a greater acceptance of people, however, it makes no obvious moral concessions to an established readership—in particular, the denunciation of the confusion of Christianity with bourgeois values is precise and deliberate.

The novel is presented as a diary—which begins as a vindictive letter to accompany a will, but which grows into a long essay in self-justification and self-exploration—written by an avaricious old man whose life has been poisoned by the failure of his marriage. Louis, solitary and unattractive in youth, had been very much a "mother's boy"—and resentful and cruel towards his mother because of this excessive dependence. His doubts about himself are to a large extent resolved by his apparent ability to please a girl from a rather fashionable family, however, and despite Isa's refusal to live with his mother after the wedding—the element of snobbery involved in this refusal is hardly enough to justify the description of it as something "horrible"²—the marriage, after fierce financial wrangling, takes place. Louis had

already known that the Fondadège family had been tempted primarily by his money, but he now learns that Isa herself had been attracted to another young man—whose family would not have contemplated marriage because of her tainted “pedigree.” Louis is deeply humiliated by this discovery—so humiliated that he will be unable to see that Isa in fact needs him and wants him—and the marriage, poisoned by what is largely a misunderstanding, turns into forty years of silence and bitterness.

In the world outside, ironically, Louis becomes a most successful lawyer and, the passion for money which he has inherited from his mother developing into a compensatory obsession, he amasses a huge fortune through the manipulation of investments. However, his miserliness renders him grotesque, alienates all around him and prevents him from finding emotional satisfaction outside the family—he is led to prefer sexual encounters where the price is fixed in advance. He comes to see his wealth as a weapon against the family, for the poisoned energies of this deeply wounded man who hides his essential vulnerability behind a mask of coldness and power can never stray far from the source of the humiliation: his wife. In Isa, perhaps, he had unconsciously been seeking someone who would replace the loved but resented mother—but Isa, by not electing him above all others and thus justifying him to himself, had failed him. She does indeed reveal herself as a mother after the birth of their eldest child Hubert, but only for her children. And Louis writes:

... you revealed your true nature: you were a mother, only a mother. Your attention turned away from me. [...] In impregnating you, I had accomplished all that you wanted from me.³

This, as it turns out, is quite wrong, since Isa has for years kept the children out of her room at night in the

hope that he might come to her, but Louis feels jealous of the love which she appears to reserve for the children and he tries to punish her by winning them away from her.

In this first stage of the war within the family Louis is defeated, since Isa has all the resources of a conventional and complacent Catholicism behind her—and also since, in this blackmailing family, she has acquired a hold over him. As his children grow up, Louis feels himself surrounded by enemies: by the tangle of vipers which mirrors the tangle of vipers in his heart. His vindictiveness, however, is given moral justification in his own eyes by the shallowness and the hypocrisy of the *bourgeois* religion amid which he lives, and he prepares for the final stage of the battle which largely occupies the action of the novel—the fight over the substitute for love: money. Louis plots to avenge himself by giving it away to an illegitimate son in Paris, but Hubert contrives to buy off this son—the transaction being effected in the quiet of the church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, with the satisfied Hubert crossing himself elaborately before leaving. Plot and counter-plot are rendered meaningless, however, by the death of Isa. The old man at last realises that he has been pursuing an illusion, comes to accept his children if not to love them, and achieves some contact with his unhappy granddaughter Janine. At various points in the story—his intimation that emotional defeat might have some spiritual meaning, his sympathy with the purity of young children, his sense of the immortality of little Marie—this freethinker has had glimpses of a higher perspective. He now feels that the caricature of Catholicism presented by the family has caused him to be unjust to Christianity and, feeling the need of a force to help him, he is led towards the one true Love—dying (with some faint melodrama, perhaps) in the middle of the finally revealing word *ador[able]*. An exchange of letters at the end of the book confirms at

once the unshakable Pharisaism of Hubert and the salvation of Louis—Janine being recorded as saying that “grandfather is the only religious man I have ever met.”⁴

Le Nœud de vipères is in the main an excellently written novel. The psychological study is interesting, the time-levels skilfully interwoven, the secondary characters very well controlled. And yet it may be asked whether the central character is finally convincing. The conversion at the end has sometimes been found to be inadequately prepared, but this is perhaps only an aspect of a larger problem—one which has been posed with some sharpness by Martin Turnell, to whom the novel seems to be “the first work of his decline, to contain within it in embryo the series of failures which followed it.”⁵ Turnell, who describes Louis as “the ventriloquist’s doll” and as being “no more than a verbal construction,” points to the exaggeration of tone and language in the old man’s narrative—the over-dramatisation of his situation through the use of such words as “torture,” “appalling,” “out-law,” etc.—and suggests that this betrays “the novelist’s own lack of inner conviction, the desperate attempt to impose his central character upon us.”⁶ Yet *Le Nœud de vipères* would seem to have greater underlying continuity than this might suggest and, if the defect which Turnell is bringing out is a real one, it may be the result of a technical deficiency and, indeed, be the effect less of a lack of inner conviction on Mauriac’s part than of an excessive self-identification with his central character.

It is probably because *Le Nœud de vipères* was to a large extent an allegory of his own change of heart that Mauriac felt that this was a novel to be written in the first person. The result, however, is that he loses not only the discipline of the enforced projection of third-person narration but also—since he is tied to the awareness of the central character—his own distinctive dimension of background suggestion. In these circumstances, *Le Nœud de vipères* becomes an extremely difficult novel to write.

Critics have often spoken of Louis' sincerity and of his psychological acumen—qualities which are obviously needed to motivate his salvation and to enable him to carry the narrative—but the sincerity and the psychological penetration are those of a miser who has ruined his life through persistent bad faith and through a radical failure to understand himself or those around him. By writing in the first person, Mauriac tends to imprison the whole novel within his hero's own contradictions.

In a general way, Mauriac's control is admirable and, significantly, he falters only when he is too close to his narrator. The over-emphatic language to which Turnell points is strongly reminiscent of the writer's own speech. Again, even though avarice is an excellent means of suggesting emotional tightness, Mauriac seems to identify himself so narrowly with his story-teller that at moments he has to remind himself, and the reader, that Louis is an actual miser. An obvious example occurs in the latter part of the novel when Louis, without qualifying comment, recounts his miserly activity in the restaurant—if what he has learnt is at all real, one feels, he should by now have seen through the sheer naïvety and the futility of this behaviour.⁷ In the very next paragraph we have an example of a third order of difficulty, when Louis—the adoption of a Christian vocabulary seems here to be unprepared, particularly in view of what has preceded—feels that he is cruel “like all those who are not on the side of the Lamb.”⁸ Mauriac's approach forces him to restrict himself—understandably an almost impossible task for him—to the mode of thought of a freethinker. To some extent, the difficulty of leading Louis towards salvation is lessened in that, although he is represented as being highly intelligent, there is no philosophical element in his conversion—it is tied essentially to the resolution of a private emotional crisis. Nevertheless, Mauriac must still conduct his enterprise as through the freethinker's own consciousness. Deprived of

the force of suggestion of third-person narration, he tends to rely upon orienting touches which, however discreet in intention, seem somewhat arbitrary and superimposed. If the cumulative effect of all this is to make it hard for us to believe in Louis, it is less because he is inconsistent as a character—at the psychological level this is quite acceptable—than because there is a continuing conflict between Louis as character and his status as narrator.

A further irony follows from this defect of presentation, however. The linguistic inflation which Turnell has noted would present no difficulty to the reader who saw Louis as a self-dramatising man. Indeed the artistic economy of the novel as it stands could be almost wholly justified through a reading of the hero as a man dogged by a fundamental emotional immaturity, who adopts a love-hate attitude towards Christianity which is largely the extension of his love-hate relationship with his wife and who, having succeeded only after his wife's death in realising his blindness, is led pathetically to bury his human failure in religion. The effect of the technical flaw is to bring out sharply the rather negative aspect of the novel—governed, ultimately, by the enclosing Jansenist "outer circle." Louis' weakness is balanced within the economy of the novel by the attack on the Pharisees, but his failure would seem to be decided essentially by his own involvement in this world and, in particular, by the emotional immaturity—which he himself equates with "an absolute inability to live."⁹ Within the dynamics of the novel, the validity of the portrait of Louis necessarily affects the validity of the attack on *bourgeois* Catholicism and, to the extent that Louis' salvation appears to be built upon—and even at moments somewhat romantically authenticated by—emotional failure, the reader may be led to wonder whether the forthright attack on middle-class Catholicism proceeds from any very clear moral standpoint, or whether it is not in some degree tinged with a dislike that is emotional in origin.

That there is some truth in this is confirmed by Mauriac's novel of the following year, in which both resentment and moral stand melt into a nostalgic hymn to the *bourgeois* family and a poetic plea—if a despairing one, since Mauriac sees the dark cloud of social change on the horizon—for the stable, older world of landed property. *Le Mystère Frontenac*, indeed, might be seen as the symbolical return of the “prodigal son” to the formal values of his provincial childhood. The writing of this novel was governed by the special circumstance of Mauriac's grave illness of 1932, and it is in many ways a very private work—the name Frontenac is itself a kind of disguised abbreviation of Fr[ançois Mauri]ac. The author is here freely transposing his own family and, above all, in Blanche Frontenac—who dies in the course of the book—his own mother. This rather episodic novel, while it is not uninteresting, is essentially a sentimental work in that the ideal of the family is stated rather than represented; the burden of the novel is carried by the meditative and lyrical passages rather than by concrete situations, or by the attitude of the self-absorbed prodigal Yves, who occupies such a large place. Whilst this novel may well seem moving, within the context of Mauriac's development, as a kind of homecoming, the ultimately moving element is perhaps the sadness and, indeed, the underlying despair from which the lyricism and the sentimentality are felt to spring—mirrored in the intuition of Jean-Paul that the writing of his brother Yves “would never be other than the expression of a certain despair.”¹⁰

The somewhat ambiguous attack on the Pharisaical *bourgeoisie* of *Le Nœud de vipères* is thus followed immediately by what might also appear to be a rather ambiguous, “posthumous” plea for the *bourgeoisie*. This rather strange juxtaposition obviously suggests that the dilemma underlying the novels so far has not, in its moral prolongations at least, been entirely resolved. More signifi-

cantly, however, it also suggests that the conflict has been largely superseded as a direct challenge at the level of experience. Indeed, the essential cycle of Mauriac's fiction has come to an end. From now on, he will be a different kind of writer.

While a number of more recent critics are now agreed in finding a gradual decline in quality in Mauriac's novels of this later period, it is clear that the reason is not to be sought in any loss of accomplishment on the part of the writer—indeed he is in some ways more accomplished. Now that he has moved beyond the passionate involvement which dictated the poetic confrontation with the world in the major cycle, however, there enters increasingly into his work a certain hollowness, a lack of central persuasion. If in *Le Nœud de vipères* the hollowness may as yet be attributed partly to a defect in presentation, in *Le Mystère Frontenac* it has become sentimentality and, thereafter, it seems to take the form of a continuing slackness, a trend towards abstraction. This change in Mauriac's writing, which has been variously interpreted, is governed by several factors.

To some extent the uncertainty of Mauriac's work at this time can be attributed to embarrassment. Marcel Jouhandeau, for example, recounts a conversational exchange of 1937 during which Mauriac said to him: "Ah, Jouhandeau, what a book might I not have written had I been as little concerned about giving offence as you are."¹¹ Certainly, now that he is seeking to express his more orthodox approach to the faith, Mauriac tends to be inhibited by his awareness of his public. Although he did try to maintain his overall conception of his art, he was very conscious of the need to show greater charity and to render his conversions more acceptable, while in effect—by banning certain subjects and generally underplaying passion and the sensuous collusion of nature—he imposed restrictions upon himself. For the "instinctive writer" so to clip his wings as an artist was to court the

danger of a sterilising self-consciousness—as Mauriac himself recognises in *Journal II*, where he writes:

It is to the extent that the will enters into my books (through scruple, the fear of causing scandal, etc.) that I feel myself threatened.¹²

To-day, in conversation, he takes the view that it was this “bad conscience” about his writing which caused him to spoil some of the later novels.

To say that Mauriac’s inhibition was real, however, is not to subscribe to O’Brien’s moral and political interpretation of the matter. Seeing the “terrible setback” of *Le Mystère Frontenac* as being due to a “loss of nerve” on Mauriac’s part, he ascribes this to the writer’s realisation that, had he continued with the harsh social realism still to be found in *Le Nœud de vipères*, he might have been led towards

a highly repulsive full-length portrait of what had hitherto been shown in discreet miniature—Mauriac’s class, his acquaintances, and, most important, his family.¹³

There may well be an element of truth in O’Brien’s general assertion that Mauriac “had accepted an intellectual, and therefore false, solution to an emotional dilemma,” but it is hardly such as to sustain his interpretation of this moment of Mauriac’s career.¹⁴ The sentimentality of *Le Mystère Frontenac* is already latent in the ambiguity underlying the attack on the *bourgeoisie* in *Le Nœud de vipères*—this novel marks an ending rather than a beginning. In fact, the criticism of the provincial middle class was already complete in *Genitrix*, ten years previously, and if it continued thereafter it is because it was directly dependent upon the emotional dilemma—it is essentially through the emotional that the moral enters the world of Mauriac’s fiction. There might indeed seem to be sufficient lingering nostalgia and flashes of

resentment in the later work to support the view that the central problem had not in its own terms been *completely* resolved, but the writings surrounding the crisis and the very lack of basic tension in the later novels suggest that Mauriac had moved beyond it. And the change in his writing is largely the effect of the simple slackening of the internal necessity dictating the work.

For the instinctive novelist proper has come to an end. The real richness of the earlier work and the separate "planetary" atmosphere surrounding it had sprung from the pressure upon the "outer circle" of the Jansenist imagination of an inner circle of emotional contradiction. It was this pressure which had given the work its real sense of destiny, its poetic suggestion, its organic structure, its human urgency, and, in many ways, its moral drive. With the subsiding of Mauriac's own compulsion to write, however, this dynamic complex has been largely dispersed. He is left with a new will to understand humanity and the wider world, but the creative imagination is still confined within the outer circle of Jansenist pessimism. He tries to believe in human happiness—reminding himself in the *Journal* that "paltry human happiness is after all a reality"¹⁵—but the stark polarity of the imagination will ultimately admit no happiness other than that achieved against the world in God. He tries to believe in human responsibility, but at bottom he cannot break free from the headier Jansenist sense of the election of souls.¹⁶ In the continuing "sulphurous light" of the novels, human defeat will interact with the romantic reversibility of sinner and saint, while intermediates will tend to be eclipsed. Mauriac will "elect" as hero the human failure—who in the next two novels will be represented as the victim of diabolic possession—and attempt to resolve his cosmic paradox through a death-bed salvation. Indeed, failure and death—or, in the case of the priest, suffering—will emerge almost as being the conditions of salvation. Over the next few years, his

novels will sometimes seem to be less concerned with concretely realised individuals than with problems, while the construction will tend to be schematic rather than organic. More damagingly, perhaps, the secret sympathy welling up through the writing will tend to be replaced by the apostrophic commentator justifying the ways of God to man.

In retrospect, it seems clear that the romantic, Jansenist view of life governing Mauriac's imagination at this time was unlikely to lead to convincing novels within the realist idiom towards the middle of the twentieth century. It tends to deny the world and its intermediate values, whereas the realist novel persuades essentially through the illusion of the reality of the relative world. This conflict, always latent in Mauriac's fiction, had been contained in the rich central period through the instinctive sympathy with the world and the vibrant poetic suggestion which accompanied it. Now, however, the starkness of his vision of the world is likely to conflict with the experience of an increasingly secularised public. At the same time Mauriac, with his developing wider interests, was already moving beyond the novel as a necessary means of self-expression. It so happened, however, that he was at the height of his career, a member of the Académie and a celebrity—and to that extent the prisoner of an existing audience. It should also be remembered that he was a professional man of letters, subject to the pressures inciting the highly successful writer to continue publishing.¹⁷ And he was also under the much more precise pressure engendered by the widespread discussion, centring around the study of Du Bos, of the problem of the Catholic novel. This discussion placed him in a somewhat false position, since he did not believe in the "Catholic novel" as such.¹⁸ The circumstances, however, were such as to lead him not only to write novels, but to attempt to write the great Catholic novel of salvation which seemed to be demanded by an ex-

pectant readership. And the resulting strains are ominously heralded by the extraordinary embarrassment of the Preface to his much-debated novel of 1935: *La Fin de la nuit*.

Mauriac had already revived Thérèse Desqueyroux in two short stories written in 1933—later to be published in *Plongées*. Neither of these stories is very satisfying. It is true that “Thérèse chez le docteur” has a quite effective atmosphere, but the central portrait of a “humanist” psychiatrist applying the “dirty key” of sexuality to every situation is somewhat ingenuous. “Thérèse à l’hôtel,” which shows us a Thérèse who has now gone beyond the “dirty business” of love having a somewhat mysterious encounter with an exalted adolescent, borders perilously at moments on the pious novelette. In his Preface to *La Fin de la nuit*, Mauriac tells us rather romantically that his title sprang from the fact that Thérèse, “weary of living within me, craved for death” and that he wanted her death to be a Christian one. The trouble is that Thérèse has come for Mauriac to be a kind of transcendent problem-figure existing independently of her original situation and of the somewhat contrived, open-ended situation into which he now projects her. The concrete situation of destiny has been replaced by the *idea* of evil.

Although he begins his Preface by saying that this novel is not to be taken as a sequel to *Thérèse Desqueyroux*, he is also at pains to remind his Catholic audience that “my heroine belongs to a period of my life now long past and that she bears witness to a phase of restlessness now superseded.” He explains that he has not been able to represent Thérèse’s salvation, since he could not visualise the priest who was to have received her confession. However—and the implications of this both with regard to the creative function of the novelist and the general ministering role of the Church are perhaps surprising—he has since discovered this priest in Rome and he now knows

"how Thérèse entered into the eternal radiance of death." The meaning of the novel is supplied in a few brief sentences. Thérèse is in the grip of "the power which is given her to poison and corrupt": but she also stands for the power, given to all, to resist the fatality which grinds her down. The movement from the original novel is already emerging: the particular woman led to crime by a particular situation is being abstracted from this particularity—which in the realistic novel tends to constitute reality—to become generalised as the Poisoner. As the situation of destiny has been replaced by the idea of evil, so the woman has turned into the symbol, the problem.

For the novelist to begin with an idea or a problem is common, but the condition of success within the realistic approach which Mauriac is adopting is that the idea emerge *by implication* from the reality of situation and psychological awareness—from the concrete relativity of the work rather than from direct statement. This is particularly necessary in this case in that the heroine who is torn by Good and Evil is represented as a free-thinker and cannot therefore logically apprehend her conflict, before she is brought to final realisation, in Christian terms. *La Fin de la nuit*, however, hardly suggests that Mauriac has met the artistic demands of his enterprise, and in this respect it is appropriate, initially, to glance at the problem of the "omniscient narrator" raised by Sartre. The polemical prolongations of this famous attack—if only because it has never adequately been answered, and because Mauriac to-day generously grants that "on the whole Sartre was right"—need not be considered here. Sartre was not attacking Mauriac on philosophical grounds—on the contrary, he takes the view that Christian writers have an advantage in fiction—but rather using his critique as an occasion for restating the aesthetic of contemporary realism, with its emphasis on the artistic autonomy of the novel. And his

main contention—that Mauriac's constant intrusion into the narrative with evaluative comment and general statement tends to destroy the fictional reality which he is trying to establish—is one with which many readers of the novel to-day would feel bound to agree.

To some extent the problem is one of literary taste in that the convention of the omniscient narrator—well-established though it is—may seem simply to be old-fashioned in the present-day novel. Nevertheless, a technique can only be said to be appropriate or not in relation to the work itself and, in the case of this particular technique, much clearly depends upon what the narrator is being omniscient about. The most obvious difficulty in *La Fin de la nuit* is that Mauriac's narrator is being omniscient in a quasi-divine manner about Evil and Grace. If he has sometimes referred to the novelist as the "ape of God," he is here rather playing God himself—and he is not, of course, writing within a unified culture in which certain basic religious assumptions can be taken to be accepted by all. Even so, diabolic possession can achieve universality as a theme so long as it appears to the reader—entering into the illusion of fiction and accepting it as reality—to correspond to the inherent movement of the story and the psychological fact. Mauriac, however, instead of submitting himself to the relativity of the situation of his freethinking heroine, tends to state the metaphysical meaning of her life, her power for evil, her mission to destroy and corrupt (which by the end of the novel is seen rather differently as a mission to introduce a fruitful uneasiness into "half-dead hearts"¹⁹) in terms which are external and even opposed to her own awareness. The result is that he seems constantly to be destroying his own illusion. The reader can either accept Thérèse within the duration of her situation, or believe the absolute, extra-temporal judgments of the transcendent narrator—it is difficult simultaneously to do both. Indeed, by introducing this disruptive conflict be-

tween the action and the stated meaning Mauriac might seem, ironically, to be devaluing his heroine in such a manner as almost to *create* the difficulty of bringing her to salvation.

This central weakness in his approach, however, simply reflects the general fact that *La Fin de la nuit* is not realised as art. Mauriac seems to be presenting a theatrical situation rather than a fully developed fictional plot. Whereas in *Thérèse Desqueyroux* the sense of destiny was promoted by the pressure of the situation and the inevitability of event, this schematic story of Thérèse fighting her evil fascination over her daughter's young man is essentially static. Mauriac, accordingly, is led to fill up with elaborate psychological analysis, which sometimes tends towards the discursive and which also carries over into the characters' own speech—the "avowal scene" in the middle of the novel, for example, seems rather inert and unreal. Yet all this standard analysis, ultimately, is rendered virtually irrelevant, not only by the higher knowledge of the narrator but by a set of pervasive notations suggestive of popular romanticism. Although some attempt is made to give concrete support to these novelettish references—Thérèse has a bad heart, she dresses somewhat oddly, she is losing part of her hair in front—it is all too clear that Mauriac is trying to convince by actualising a number of stock metaphors and, indeed, conversational *clichés*. Thus Thérèse, since she is evil, is described as *une bête puante*.²⁰ Since she is the Poisoner, she "poisons" her daughter's happiness and all around her; words literally "strike at her heart"; she has a "shipwrecked look," a "true face," and a "mask"; she draws back a lock of hair so that young Georges may recoil in horror at the sight of her "ravaged brow" and thus escape her evil spell. . . .

The repetition of this last symbolical gesture—which, Mauriac tells us in his Preface, "expresses the whole meaning of the novel"—seems so theatrical, in an ostens-

ibly realistic psychological study, as to be almost operatic. Inevitably, the element of melodrama underlying these touches adds to the blurred effect of the novel. Whereas the mystery of Thérèse's possession by evil demands that this woman of forty-five be mysteriously spared by time and have a brow (beneath the concealed ravages) almost free from wrinkles, the pathos of her situation elsewhere demands that she be described as an old woman. Whereas her alienation through her fatal power demands that she be represented as being incapable of feeling, she in fact dramatises herself and—as the story of course requires—feels intensely throughout the novel. It is difficult to see how *La Fin de la nuit* could persuade the reader who is not already persuaded. If it fails to come alive as fiction, it would appear to be because it is intellectually contrived, because its artistic means are not coherent, and because its psychology is ultimately subordinated to what is felt to be a melodramatic psycho-theology. And the reason for this failure is cruelly underlined by Mauriac in his Preface when he speaks of his heroine as belonging to the past. In *Thérèse Desqueyroux* the instinctive writer was writing passionately for himself; in *La Fin de la nuit* the successful man of letters is attempting, in problematic terms, to revive a ghost for an established audience.

Les Anges noirs of the following year, a novel which superimposes the story of the salvation of a murderer upon the familiar family entanglement, displays similar defects—the same melodramatic approach, the same dichotomy between the metaphysical and the psychological. In addition, although this attempt at a “Catholic thriller” called for firm plotting, Mauriac handles his plot badly. Once again, if Gradère himself—the murderer pursued by an evil presence, who mysteriously retains the fresh face of the child and who never feels the cold—is essentially a cardboard figure, much of the incidental writing is good and there is some effective secondary

characterisation. At this stage, however, one feels that the writer, at best, is repeating himself. *Les Chemins de la mer* (1939) is a rather laboured novel about individual vocation and, while Mauriac gained to some extent by reverting briefly to the shorter form after the War, a work such as *Galigai* (1952) still leaves the impression of a somewhat arid and negative demonstration. The one novel which stands out among those written since *Le Nœud de vipères* as having something of the old vibration and sureness of touch is *La Pharissienne* of 1941.

Although Mauriac has now clearly taken some of Sartre's strictures to heart, the improvement in quality seen in *La Pharissienne* would not seem to derive from this. Mauriac tends in fact to go to the other extreme, with the result that the narrator's insistence on the documentary evidence for the views he is putting forward leads to a faintly academic presentation. The quality of the novel is perhaps due rather to the fact that Mauriac, writing as a despairing gesture of self-assertion in the first dark months of the Occupation, was much less aware than previously of the audience looking over his shoulder and was very much on home ground in portraying a "Pharisee." Certainly, there is something of the old attack in his sharp handling of the hypocritical and bigoted Brigitte Pian. Ironically, however, the very effectiveness of his treatment of Brigitte tends to emphasise the overall unsatisfactoriness of the "novel of salvation" which he is attempting to write in this later phase of his career. For the reader has some difficulty in relating this portrait to the global meaning and to the moral perspective postulated by the novel as a whole.

The imbalance of *La Pharissienne* in this connexion springs most obviously from the fact that the salvation of Brigitte is rushed through so unconvincingly at the end that the reader might even see in it an element of Flaubertian irony. In view of this failure to resolve the situation positively in its own terms, there is not felt to be any

adequate counterpoise to the harshness of the portrait of the Pharisee, so that the novel comes to seem negative and almost gratuitously depressing. We have the ineffectual, if attractive Abbé Calou, the typical Mauriac priest isolated both humanly and within the Church; we have the rather lofty treatment by the narrator of the innocent victims, the Puybarauds (who sometimes talk to each other, be it said in passing, in a very unreal manner); we have Michèle and Jean who, characteristically enough, will not achieve happiness. Above all, we have the colouring given to the story by the somewhat chilling narrator, who hardly provides the reader with an adequate viewpoint. Some of the casual observations of this uncharitable commentator who complacently attributes the ills of mankind to in chastity are suggestive of a strangely sterile dislike, not to say contempt, for what is ordinary in human life. The final impression of unsatisfactoriness would not seem simply to be the negative effect of the unconvincing ending; on the contrary, it derives rather from the sense that the unreality of Brigitte's salvation is organically inscribed in the view of life underlying the whole work. The hollowness which has already been noted has deepened into bitterness. As a study of hypocrisy, *La Pharisienne* is very effective, but judged within its own economy as a novel of salvation it is surely, in the end, lacking in simple human warmth and—disconcertingly perhaps—in true moral seriousness.

In dealing with the artistic situation of the later novelist, critics have often invoked the inherent difficulty of the novel of salvation. And yet, in so far as conversion affects the personality as a principle governing awareness and inflecting behaviour, it is not easy to see any insuperable barrier to its successful rendering in the novel. The difficulty in Mauriac's case is rather that his starkly romantic pessimism tends to eclipse the moral intermediates, the simple belief in people and, indeed, the sense of Christianity as a living community which would enable him

effectively to present the progression from sin to salvation. In suggesting that the decline in quality since *Le Nœud de vipères* is to be attributed to the Jansenist attitude underlying these novels, Martin Turnell writes:

It accounts for his poor opinion of human nature, his sense of the nothingness of man, and his lack of charity towards his fellow-men. It also accounts for the unsatisfactoriness of his protagonists and for the unconvincing conversions.²¹

Although the term is a convenient one, it is clearly a little unreal, however, to describe a twentieth-century novelist as a "Jansenist"—particularly since Mauriac (never deeply concerned with theology in any event) does not subscribe intellectually to this doctrine. The use of the term muffles a necessary criticism which is better stated more directly. The weakness of these novels of salvation would seem to proceed from the fact that the vision of life underlying them—whether judged from the Christian or from the non-Christian standpoint—is vitiated by a fundamental immaturity.

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1. Du Bos, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
2. *Nœud*, p. 40.
3. *Nœud*, p. 61.
4. *Nœud*, p. 240.
5. Turnell, *op. cit.*, p. 345.
6. Turnell, *op. cit.*, pp. 345-6.
7. *Nœud*, pp. 174-5.
8. *Nœud*, p. 175.
9. *Nœud*, p. 117.
10. *Mystère*, p. 287.
11. See *Arts*, 19-25 Dec. 1962, p. 5.
12. *J.*, II. 114.
13. O'Brien, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
14. O'Brien, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
15. *J.*, II. 191.
16. See for example, discussion of Bourdaloue in *J.*, I. 181-7.
17. See *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 22 May 1937, p. 10.
18. See interview in *Carrefour*, 24 Oct. 1951, for a very clear statement of his position with regard to both fiction and the theatre.
19. *Fin*, p. 249.
20. *Fin*, p. 184.
21. Turnell, *op. cit.*, p. 346.

CHAPTER VI

MAURIAC IN THE THEATRE

In that they go against the prevailing current of the contemporary French theatre, Mauriac's plays—*Asmodée* (1937), *Les mal aimés* (1945), *Passage du Malin* (1947), *Le Feu sur la terre* (1950)¹—tend already to seem a little dated. Ironically in some ways, this essentially naturalistic theatre written by a Christian—for the interest may be said to be psychological and sociological rather than directly metaphysical—has been largely overlaid by a freer, metaphysical theatre written mainly by agnostics.

Artistically, Mauriac both gained and lost by moving from the novel to the theatre. By obviating the embarrassment of the problem of the narrator and by obliging him to project more fully, the stage acted as a discipline which to some extent revived his work. Nevertheless, he very largely loses his characteristic "atmosphere"—with the result that his characters, outside the sustaining medium of background suggestion and selective narrative emphasis, sometimes seem rather stark or diminished. For this reason, his plays tend to depend rather heavily upon tightness of construction and a high degree of stylisation. If *Les mal aimés* is perhaps the only really good play of the four—and in some ways Mauriac's most satisfying artistic achievement since the early 1930s—it is essentially because it satisfies these demands.

In retrospect, Mauriac himself has recognized that the deeper, "Racinian" intensities of his fiction might better have been transposed into dramatic terms through a classical stylising of the contemporary situation rather than through the more directly naturalistic approach.

He was indeed, as he himself feels, moving towards this conception with *Les mal aimés*, but he did not pursue his ambition:

More than *Asmodée*, *Les mal aimés* is free from theatrical conventions and tricks. This play goes much further in a direction which was really mine but from which I turned away.²

The initial difficulty was that, coming to the theatre largely under the influence of Edouard Bourdet, Mauriac was led inevitably, if with some private doubts, to accept Bourdet's authority and to follow his approach. If he continued writing within the tradition of *bourgeois* naturalism thereafter, it is essentially for two reasons. In the first place, this already somewhat dated manner tended negatively to coincide with the old tie to the world of his own childhood. In the second place, his existing approach and the actual nature of the plays had led him to reject the idea of a specifically Catholic theatre and to adumbrate a dramatic aesthetic closely akin to his earlier "indirect apology for Christianity."

Mauriac, then, is aiming at a negatively rather than at a positively Christian theatre. He sees as his purpose the portraying of *la misère de l'homme sans Dieu* in such a manner as to impose upon the spectator—if not upon his characters—the idea of the necessity of God. That a sympathetic observer such as Gabriel Marcel should find the religious element for all practical purposes absent from the plays, however, suggests that the conception of the indirect apology is once again the writer's own paradoxical gloss on work which, in large measure, escapes his control.³ And, indeed, it might seem that Mauriac's theatre hardly satisfies the obvious demands of his aesthetic.

In the first place—and the task is harder than in the novel—Mauriac must somehow convey the hint of a higher perspective. In practice, he attempts to do this by

lending some symbolical value to one of the lesser characters. The difficulty, however, is that the naturalistic idiom tends inevitably to cut the character down to his real size within the situation and to deprive him of any authority other than that established through his part in the action. For this reason, the pure young Emmanuèle of *Asmodée* seems at moments to be a little unreal—as though Mauriac had borrowed a character from the very different theatrical climate of a Claudel. In any event, by marrying Harry—since Mauriac leads us to believe that she will be unhappy—she is embracing the suffering common to all. Similarly, Marianne in *Les mal aimés* is given some remarks—not specifically Christian—about the meaning of life, but by accepting the sacrifice of Elizabeth she too is led to participate in the general human disaster. In *Le Feu sur la terre*, this role is played by young Gabriel. Gabriel, however, plays no part in the resolution of the situation and—since it is not quite clear whether he really has a fixed vocation, or to what extent he has been pushed into the seminary by Laure to save money on his education and to deprive him of his inheritance—he remains a somewhat ambivalent as well as a minor figure. Mauriac's own comment on Gabriel is of interest here. Jean-Louis Barrault had suggested to him that *Le Feu sur la terre* was even more discouraging than the work of Kafka, since the latter at least leaves us with a question-mark, whereas Mauriac locks up his heroine within the prison of her situation. Mauriac argued somewhat diffidently that hope for Laure was not ultimately excluded, but conceded in effect that such hope was not organic to the persuasion of the play—saying also that the “requirements of the drama” prevented him from developing a significant remark by Gabriel in the first act.⁴ In practice, the indicative minor character tends to have his symbolical virtuality restricted by his situation, and either to lose his authority as the play progresses or simply to disappear from the action. The deep

pessimism of these plays, as Pierre-Henri Simon has suggested, remains essentially unrelieved.⁵

In the second place, the indirect apology requires that the spectator recognise his own world, *mutatis mutandis*, in the world of the play. He can only be persuaded of the necessity of God if the suffering he sees itself seems necessary, and relevant to his own situation—that Mauriac was aware of this is seen in the fact that he formally presents his plays as taking place in the present. From the outset, however, there is a certain *malaise* in the face of Mauriac's situations. Indeed, Crémieux's suggestion that the central relationship of *Asmodée* could have been rendered more plausible by situating the action in 1910—"its real date and the real date of the whole of Mauriac's work"⁶—is applicable to the plays in general. For this world of the rural *bourgeois* Catholic family—a world of perpetual money-squabbles, arranged marriages, formidable matriarchs, impotent patriarchs, governesses, frustrated elder sisters, angelically or fiercely pure young girls, and hesitant seminarists—is recognisable only as a stylised treatment of what is essentially a pre-1914 social phenomenon. The spectator, perceiving at once that this is not in fact the contemporary world which he has been expecting, may feel that the problems of the characters are too specific to this society—which he after all knows to have been superseded—to possess general human or moral necessity. The authoritarianism and the neurotic passion of Laure in *Le Feu sur la terre*, for example, in that they are obviously connected with the frustration imposed by her great isolation and with the general falsity of values of a degenerate form of an outmoded property and kinship pattern, hardly oblige the spectator to invoke God—he need only, and perhaps even complacently, re-assert the value of actual social change.

God, in the end, has no necessity in this theatre. The religious element impinges only as a factor in the sociological equation or, at most, as an external term of refer-

ence—a possibility too inorganic to the essential persuasion of the drama to offer more than a mechanical solution. The indirect apology, once again, does not correspond to the reality of the work. For it would be as though an English dramatist were to present a cruel picture of the strains and abnormalities of an isolated, Puritan middle-class sector of late Victorian or Edwardian society, in the hope of persuading the present-day spectator that his own more highly evolved and open society, in which these problems either do not present themselves or are amenable to solution, is dramatically in need of Christianity. To the extent that this theatre of the indirect apology is at all a consciously controlled enterprise, it is not a coherent one.

But everything suggests that Mauriac's theatre escaped his intellectual control. Indeed, it is affecting to see his perplexity and concern in the face of the tendency to find his work so darkly pessimistic and in the face of a troubling problem of interpretation arising with each play. Although he was disturbed by Pierre Brisson's suggestion with regard to *Asmodée* that the authority exerted over Madame de Barthas by Coûture, merely a tutor in the household, was implausible unless he were seen as a scoundrelly or perverted priest, he in effect came round to this view upon re-reading the play some years later.⁷ When drafting *Les mal aimés* in 1938, he found that he had all-unconsciously been repeating Coûture as M. de Virelade, and became anxious lest there should be "the slightest suspicion of incestuous love" in the character⁸—an interpretation which nevertheless imposed itself upon many when the play went into production after the War. He resisted the not unnatural tendency to see the heroine of *Passage du Malin* as a Lesbian, and the heroine of *Le Feu sur la terre* as nourishing an incestuous love for her brother Maurice. Mauriac's known sensitiveness to criticism of his plays—and he has made some scathingly dismissive remarks about theatre-critics—is perhaps not

unconnected with the sense that his theatre does not in fact correspond to his own postulates. As indeed it does not. For a glance at the plays reveals that what he has actually given us, in this cruel picture of what is essentially the world of his own childhood, is a morbid psychological theatre centred around the abnormal emotional relationship.

Theatrically, *Asmodée* suffers from a certain imbalance in that the rather conventional elements in the play—Harry himself (and the presence of this “Asmodeus” in the household is within the play’s own terms a little implausible), the children, much of the role of Emmanuèle and of that of Mademoiselle—tend to conflict with the more original relationship between Coûture and Marcelle de Barthas. Marcelle, recognising her jealousy of her daughter’s happiness, withdraws her objections to the marriage with Harry and settles down bitterly to a life “alone till death” with her familiar devil Coûture, to whom she already appears to abdicate her moral responsibility. Coûture—an extraordinary blend of Tartuffe and Stendhal’s Julien Sorel—is an obsessive “taker of souls” who nourishes a despairing Puritan passion for Marcelle, and whose life is dedicated to preserving the purity of his “masterpiece” for himself. The formal distance between them, created by the difference in social rank and by Marcelle’s contempt for him, is reinforced by the fact that Coûture’s aversion to sexuality appears to find an answering echo in Marcelle. The essential emptiness of their relationship will be filled by Coûture’s moral voyeur-ism and dog-like dedication, as well as by Marcelle’s neurotic need of this tutor whom she despises. And it is with the sketching of this appallingly perverted, definitively hopeless relationship—connected, paradoxically, with Marcelle’s self-sacrificing gesture—that *Asmodée* comes to an end.

In *Les mal aimés* it is the mother, this time, who is absent. Abandoned by his wife many years before, M. de

Virelade is now but a self-dramatising effigy of the dashing officer he had once been. For Elizabeth, the elder daughter who has replaced the mother, he has developed feelings of a passionate intensity, and he now contrives, subtly and ruthlessly, to prevent her from marrying the weak young Alain—who agrees to marry the younger daughter Marianne. Although Mauriac's time-scheme makes some of the changes of attitude towards the end seem rather arbitrary, this in itself contributes in a sense to the ballet-like effect of this grim expression of a double paralysis. *Les mal aimés* seems at once to suggest that happiness is possible but inaccessible and, through certain speeches of Marianne and Alain, to equate *le mal* with sexuality itself. The real fascination of the play, however, lies in the parallel contradiction: the manner in which the characters, accepting their intolerable situation in this closed and corrupted world, wield a moral code which is itself a mockery. Thus Elizabeth can coincide with her duty by arrogating to herself the right to "give" Marianne to Alain, while Alain can satisfy his by "accepting" the sister whom he does not love. Is M. de Virelade sentimentally incestuous, or simply selfish? Is the sacrifice of Elizabeth morally right, or the effect of false pride and weakness? Does Alain really act honourably in marrying and, thereby, inevitably rendering unhappy the girl of seventeen to whom he has "committed himself" through some ill-considered kisses—or is his motive a selfish one? It is a function of the paralysis underlying this stylised rendering of a sealed-off world—and perhaps the prime element in its theatrical effectiveness—that it provides no answer to the questions which it raises.

The failure of *Passage du Malin*—a curious compound of Juanesque comedy, Puritan bedroom farce, and talk about God—is not surprising. There was considerable dramatic potential in this clash between the "dominator of bodies" and the "dominator of souls": between a meta-

physically-inclined, semi-professional woman-hunter (who does indeed, as Marcel suggests in speaking of his "cynegetic eroticism", appear to "hunt women as others hunt the fox or the elephant"⁹) and the headmistress of a Catholic school who may possibly have had a sentimental attachment for some of her girls but who has a horror of sexuality and who does not sleep with her despised business-partner of a husband, himself martyred by the older generation of the female Family. And the theme—the inability of the Christian, tired of an admired persona which is maintained only by a mechanical belief, to renounce the faith and the human responsibilities it involves—was one which was very close to Mauriac.¹⁰ The most obvious reason for the failure of this play is that Mauriac sacrifices his theme for a savagely burlesque attack on the Family in a lengthy intermezzo which does not advance the action and which militates against the establishing of the dedicated side to Emilie's character. The result, as so often in these plays, is that the heroine seems less to attain moral stature than to resign herself as the victim.

With *Le Feu sur la terre*, the concentration of *Les mal aimés* has given way to a more flatly naturalistic approach—though there is again an admixture of burlesque. The situation itself is rather contrived, while the dialogue sometimes seems wordy. Since the presence of several characters with no essential dramatic function leads to some dispersal of interest, and since the surface of the play is so largely occupied with the somewhat vulgar machinations attendant upon the peculiar strains of this isolated society, the central relationship is perhaps not felt to impose itself fully. Here again, in the passionate attachment to her brother of the heroine—who falls into the familiar pattern through her horror of the flesh—Mauriac had a gravely interesting theme. Here again, however, the temptation to attack the Family might seem to lead him to diminish his own world by turning the

father who incarnates it, and to a lesser extent—though this was unduly stressed in performance—the mother, into figures of fun. “I don’t know upon what altar he sacrifices them,” wrote one critic, “but sacrifice them he does.”¹¹ By thus drawing attention to the specificity and, indeed, the grotesqueness of this world, he emphasises the extent of Laure’s own involvement in it—it is noteworthy that Claudel should have seen her as “the agent of that social sacrament known as Order”¹²—and in effect reduces the stature of his heroine by locking her up inside the moral equation of a quaint and corrupt society. Although Laure does remain affecting through the pathos of her nostalgia for childhood, it is possible to understand the reaction of those reviewers who found in this play the mechanical and empty quality of a world of marionettes.¹³

There is a sad contrast between the will to charity and the will to believe in humanity informing Mauriac’s courageous journalistic writings over this period and the bitterness, the climate of abnormality, and the stunted characters of these despairing plays. Here more than elsewhere, perhaps, there is truth in Martin Jarrett-Kerr’s remark that “what Mauriac is picturing as fallen is in fact only diseased.”¹⁴ More nakedly than in the late novels, the cruel lighting of the stage reveals that, within its enclosing Jansenist “outer circle,” the world of the instinctive writer has gone sour. And it is clear that this theatre is indeed the image, at the deeper level of awareness, of Mauriac’s view of life at this time. For it is not simply that he is tied by habit or by his naturalistic technique to an atrophied society—he is manifestly imposing an obsessional pattern upon this society. The constants of his theatre spring less from the contradictions of his chosen setting than from the larger cycle of contradiction permanently underlying his work.

These levels of contradiction are so fundamental to the plays, and so related, as to cover by implication the

whole field of human experience. The depicting of human society has always meant for Mauriac the depicting of the family and it is a basic contradiction in this respect—the dislike and even the hatred of the family within a moral acceptance of the family—which tends once again to provide the situation and the general field of tension. It also breaks out explicitly in three of the plays, notably in Irma's conjugation in *Passage du Malin* of the family reality which will impose itself morally upon the heroine after her brief lapse from duty:

There is nothing like hatred for uniting people. [. . .]
 She endures me, I endure her, we endure each other.
 After all, that's what family life is!¹⁵

The prison of the family, however, is only one factor producing the frustration which leads to the neurotic need to dominate others so characteristic of these protagonists. For the drama—and perhaps the very inability to escape from the family prison—tends to spring from the intimate fusion of this contradiction with another, even more basic one: the conflict between the fear or disgust of the flesh and the need for love within a morally and emotionally adult relationship. This pervasive Puritanism—which also emerges in the “authenticating” Jansenist doubts of an Emmanuèle or a Marianne as to whether happiness through marriage is permissible, or whether there is not something criminal in the giving of oneself to another—dictates the emotional paralysis, and leads naturally, within the closed world of the family, to the substitute relationship. Since the substitute relationship—as Coûture, M. de Virelade, or Laure confirms—not only cannot satisfy the real need but is likely to exacerbate the frustration, we get the characteristic vicious circle, the essential hopelessness of this world.

These underlying contradictions govern the more immediate contradictions of this theatre which, however negatively, aims at being Christian. The emotional

paralysis leads to the kind of moral confusion which prompts Mauriac, for example, to invite us to applaud the resistance of the heroine of *Passage du Malin* to sexual temptation, while leaving completely out of account the total moral and human emptiness of her relationship with her husband. For inevitably, if unknowingly, he is drawn by his Puritanism into an uneasy negative coincidence with a fossilised code which so often reveals itself to the spectator as being a travesty of morality. It is this—and a related lack of human warmth—which seems to sterilise this theatre, to make it appear so remote. And it is perhaps very largely this which, by excluding any profound moral perspective or any real dimension of evil, excludes any real possibility of grace. This theatre might seem to be so constituted that it can plead convincingly neither for man nor for God.

A theatre which springs from the inability to accept the conditions of adult living can only, in the end, have one real term of reference: childhood. And, pathetically, it is essentially the ephemeral grace and the already-doomed innocence of adolescence that these plays offer as the reality of purity and of faith. Yet in the world of this theatre a Gabriel cannot escape his ambivalence or establish himself as a significant influence, an Emmanuèle can only move from childhood into the suffering of adult relationships, a Marianne can only grow up and be broken by the contradictions of Mauriac's "infernal machine." And there remains only the underlying sense of childhood betrayed.

This sense, however, is so strong as to justify, from Mauriac's point of view, his disclaimer with regard to the apparent incest and other sexual anomalies in the plays—for these are indeed very largely the purely negative expressions of the rejection of sexuality itself, and of the failure to attain moral and emotional adulthood which tends to accompany it. With the heroine of the last play, in particular, this is very clear. Laure is not so much

in love with her brother or even in love with herself, cruelly dominating and scheming as she is, as in love with the childhood which time and her brother's marriage have betrayed—with the world anterior to separateness and sexuality in which she had equal status since all loves were equal and conjoined within a warm and safe continuum. And the moment of truth comes to this whole theatre when Laure seems momentarily to have gone out to drown herself in the well in which she and her brother united their reflexions as children. It is at once sad and fitting that Mauriac's enterprise on the stage should end with this image of his heroine lingering, baffled and alone, beside her empty mirror—the perfidious and, in the event, the dried-up well of childhood.

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3. See Gabriel Marcel, *op. cit.*
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5. Simon, "L'Échec de l'Amour dans les théâtres de François Mauriac et d'Henry de Montherlant," in *Théâtre et Destin*, 1959.
6. B. Crémieux, review of *Asmodée*, 1938, p. 148.
7. See Pierre Brisson, *Le Figaro*, 28 Nov. and 5 Dec. 1937; also J.-J. Gautier, *Les grandes premières. Asmodée*, 1953.
8. See Claude Mauriac, in *La Table ronde*, Jan. 1953, p. 77.
9. Gabriel Marcel, review of *Passage*, 1947, p. 8.
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11. Jacques Lemarchand, review of *Feu*, 1950, p. 10.
12. Paul Claudel, review of *Feu*, 1950, p. 4.
13. See Raymond Cogniat in *Arts*, 17 Nov. 1950; Georges Lermnier in *Terre Humaine*, Feb. 1951.
14. Jarrett-Kerr, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
15. *Passage*, p. 116.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

"That first duty towards myself," writes Mauriac in his *Journal*, "to externalise my own debate, my drama, my destiny." And on the preceding page he has written:

There are men who cannot imagine how they could have lived, if they had not been able to give expression to their torment.¹

Mauriac has always known that the imaginative writer is often impelled by the drive to project a deep-rooted inner conflict—as he has also recognised that the impact of the work upon the reader is sometimes that of an act of violence amounting to a violation.

From the "rat-trap" of Bordeaux through the "cage" of a Dr Courrèges to the closed world of the plays, the characteristic Mauriac situation is the trap. Martin Turnell sees this as expressing Mauriac's own situation:

... the novels are symbolical Acts of Violence which give the illusion of escape from the trap. And for Mauriac the trap is religion—the Jansenist Catholicism which was "imposed" upon him at birth.²

If there is a great deal of truth in this, it would hardly seem to be the whole truth about Mauriac's "drama." In that the mainspring would seem rather to have been a fundamental emotional dilemma imposed by the mother-centred childhood, the real "trap"—the coincidence of a metaphysical with a determinant emotional polarity, within a situation delimited morally by the interacting values of a Puritan Catholicism and a pro-

vincial middle class—was perhaps rather more complex, and more formidable. That in these circumstances Mauriac, in some of his novels at least, has contrived to involve humanity at large is a tribute to his talent and to his courage. And that he should have established himself as an influence in the public affairs of his time is in itself a remarkable achievement.

If the older view of a Mauriac purging his work of “unhealthy elements” in the late 1920s in order to flower into the great Catholic novelist of the 1930s is now being abandoned, it is because it was essentially a short-term and sentimental one. It sprang to a large extent—and very honourably—from the concern of Mauriac’s friends and co-religionists for the man himself, but it took insufficient account of the nature of his imaginative enterprise or, as it might also seem, of the literary values of intensity, organic unity, and poetic suggestion. More curiously, perhaps, it was often associated with certain abstract assumptions in regard to the “Catholic novel” which a consideration of the actual tradition of Catholic novelists, from Barbey d’Aureville to Julien Green, might have been expected to dispel. To exclude this view is in effect, of course, to exclude the equally simplified opposite view of a Mauriac declining as a novelist because he gave in to middle-class pressures—the courage of the journalistic writings would hardly support this interpretation—or, indeed, because of his more positive assumption of his faith after the crisis. It was rather the fact of the crisis itself—the emergence of the moral issue from the emotional conflict dictating the rising intensity and the human urgency of the richer novels of the 1920s—which brought the “instinctive novelist” proper in Mauriac to an end. If his later work does not possess the same compulsion or the same artistic unity, if it tends to become embarrassed, mechanical, and eventually sour, it is because the drive and involvement behind the writing have slackened, because

the sureness of intuition has given way to uncertainty with regard to his role as a writer, and because the underlying persistence of the Jansenist Puritanism and pessimism is not compatible, in the end, with a humanly convincing presentation either of salvation or of *la misère de l'homme sans Dieu*.

It is certain, however, that with a certain feverish yet precisely evocative quality of style, immediately involving the physical in the metaphysical, Mauriac has enriched the contemporary novel with a rare and distinctive tone. And it might seem that in such works as *Le Désert de l'amour* and *Thérèse Desqueyroux*—perhaps also *Genitrix*, *Le Nœud de vipères* and, of the plays, *Les mal aimés*—he has produced imaginative writing of lasting importance. That the Catholic novelist should achieve permanence through the more rebellious or troubled of his writings may well appear paradoxical, but this is hardly new in Catholic writing and Mauriac himself has come to believe that, ultimately, the paradox is only an apparent one. Insofar as the value of the testimony is a function of the quality of the art, he is probably right. In the longer perspective, his contribution to his faith is not only to have maintained it in its public application against opposition from whatever quarter, but to have produced writings which—through the reality of their tensions—bear witness to the continuance of the Christian sense of life as an element in the culture of his time.

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2. Turnell, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

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